

**The Darfur Conflict: Beyond ‘Ethnic Hatred’  
explanations**

by

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Declaration

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work contained in this research assignment/thesis is my own original work and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it at any university for a degree.

Signature:.....

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## **Abstract**

Sudan is a country that has been affected by a history of multiple destructive civil wars. Conflicts that, in a global perspective, have proven to be as devastating as interstate wars, or on occasion even more destructive, in terms of the numbers of casualties, refugee figures and the effects on a country's society.

The conflict in Darfur, in the western region of Sudan, is a civil war that illustrates one of the direst scenarios. In around five years of warfare, more than 200,000 people have died in the conflict, and around two million Darfurians were displaced, creating what the UN calls the "world's worst humanitarian crisis." The civil war was initiated by the attacks of two rebel groups, the Sudan Liberation Movement/Army and the Justice and Equality Movement, against government installations. Although presenting insurgency characteristics, the civil war in Darfur has been commonly labelled as a "tribal" conflict of "Africans" versus "Arabs". An explanation that seems to fail to clarify the complex circumstances belying the situation. As seen in this study, although identity factors played their role as a cause of the conflict, the 'ethnic hatred' justification of war doesn't seem to be sufficient to explain the present situation. Darfur appears to be a clear example that there is no single factor that can explain such a war.

In the case of Darfur, various factors seem to have interplayed in creating the necessary conditions for the eruption of violence. This study focused on two of these factors – the environmental hazards that have been affecting the region, and the government's use of the Janjaweed militia in its counterinsurgency movement. Both, and in different ways, seem to have contributed to dividing the Darfurian society between two poles, thus worsening the circumstances in the region and helping generate the high levels of violence that characterise the Darfur conflict.

Most important, in analysing the conflict of Darfur with a point of view that goes beyond the "ethnic hatred" explanation, it seems possible to identify issues, such as land ownership, that are in vital need of being addressed in order to achieve peace in

the region. As seen in this thesis, it seems that it is only through a broad understanding of the complex causes of the conflict that peace negotiations might have any hope of success. While those continue to be ignored, any peace agreements or prospects of finding a solution to the conflict will be unrealistic.

## Opsomming

Soedan is 'n staat met 'n geskiedenis van verskeie verwoestende burgeroorloë. Hierdie konflikte het, vanuit 'n globale perspektief, getoon dat hulle net so verwoestend as interstaatsoorloë kan wees – of selfs meer verwoestend in terme van die getal sterftes, vlugteling en sosiale impak.

Die konflik in Darfoer, in westelike Soedan, is 'n burgeroorlog wat een van die ergste scenarios uitbeeld. Gedurende omtrent vyf jaar van oorlogvoering, is meer as 200 000 mense dood en omtrent twee miljoen mense verplaas om 'n situasie te skep wat die VN as die “wêreld se ergste humanitêre krisis” bestempel het. Die burgeroorlog is begin deur aanvalle teen regeringsinstallasies deur twee rebelgroepe, die Soedanese Vryheidsbeweging en die Beweging vir Geregtigheid en Gelykheid. Alhoewel dit na 'n tipiese insurgensie lyk, is die burgeroorlog in Darfoer algemeen bestempel as 'n “stam” konflik van “Afrikane” teen “Arabiere”. Hierdie verduideliking slaag nie daarin om die komplekse omstandighede wat tot die situasie gelei het, te verhelder nie. Soos hierdie studie aandui, het identiteitsfaktore 'n rol gespeel as 'n ontstaan van die konflik, maar die “etniese haat” verduideliking vir oorlog blyk nie genoegsaam te wees in hierdie geval nie. Darfoer blyk 'n duidelike geval te wees waar geen enkele faktor die oorlog genoegsaam kan verduidelik nie.

In Darfoer, blyk dit dat verskeie faktore bygedra het tot die toestande wat nodig was vir die uitbreek van geweld. Hierdie studie fokus op twee van hierdie faktore – die natuurlike omgewingsfaktore wat die area beïnvloed het, en die regering se gebruik van die Janjaweed magte in sy pogings om die insurgensie teen te staan. Albei het in verskillende maniere daartoe bygedra om die samelewing in Darfoer te polariseer. Dit het die omstandighede in die area vererger en gehelp om die hoë vlakke van geweld wat kenmerkend van die konflik is, teweeg te bring.

Dis belangrik dat, deur die konflik in Darfoer te analiseer vanuit 'n oogpunt wat verder as die “etniese haat” verduideliking strek, dit moontlik is om kwessies (soos grondeienaarskap) te identifiseer wat aangespreek moet word om vrede te bewerkstellig. Soos die tesis bewys, is dit slegs deur 'n breë begrip van die komplekse

oorsake van die konflik dat vredesonderhandelings kan slaag. Solank as wat hierdie oorsake geïgnoreer word, bly enige vredesooreenkoms of kanse op 'n langdurige oplossing onrealisties.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

## **1.1 Introduction**

Civil wars do not always make the front page of the newspapers or get much air time on the main news television programmes. In order to avoid audience fatigue and the risk of losing viewers, the media tends to jump from one story to another. People easily ignore images of children and civilian victims of conflicts such as the ones in Africa, which never seem to have a solution or are too complicated. However, they are a reality with appalling casualties. 16,2 million people died in civil conflicts across the world from 1945 to 1999, five times more than in wars between states (Fearon & Laitin, 2003:75). These civil wars not only generate more casualties than interstate wars, but also a higher number of refugees and have a larger impact on countries' economies (Fearon & Laitin, 2003:75). As Turton says (1997:77), "they are particularly destructive of the lives and livelihoods of civilians; and they are waged not against an anonymous and invisible enemy but against neighbours, friends and even relatives". It is due to the importance and effects of such conflicts, that this study focuses on the case of Darfur in Sudan and aims to examine the underlying characteristics of this specific civil war.

Sudan, the largest country on the African continent, has a long history of multiple civil wars with devastating effects within its society. Since Sudan's independence from the British-Egyptian colonial rule in 1956, the country has managed to sustain a meagre 11-year period of relative peace between internal conflicts. It has been home to one of the longest civil wars in Africa, often described in terms of its religious character, as a fight between the Muslim-dominated government based in the north of the country and the rebels from the south, a region where the majority of inhabitants are Christians. A conflict also linked to disputes over power and resources control, intensified with the discovery in 1978 of large reserves of oil in the southern areas of the country (Basha, 2006: 7, 12).

Whilst the conflict in southern Sudan is of vital importance in the understanding of the country's history of civilian warfare, this study is concerned with and delimited to a conflict in another region of Sudan: Darfur. This area lies in the west of the country and is approximately the size of France. Darfur used to have autonomy under the

Anglo-Egyptian condominium, only becoming part of the country in 1916, when the British rule annexed the region to Sudan (Kajee, 2006: 130).

Although the origins of the conflict in Darfur can be traced further back, the current civil war in the region erupted in 2003 when the rebel groups of the Sudan Liberation Movement/Army (SLM/A) and the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) – consisting mainly of “African tribes” - launched an attack against the Sudanese Arab-dominated government. The beginning of the conflict coincided with the final negotiations of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) between the government and the Sudanese People’s Liberation Movement (SPLA), who were negotiating an end to the already briefly-described 21-year civil war in the southern area of Sudan against the north – which was officially concluded in 2005 (Sharamo, 2006:51).

In the said agreement, the government of Sudan accepted to share power with the SPLA, giving major autonomy for the southern region of the country and conceding to the organisation of a referendum in 2011, in which the population would have the right to decide whether they want to divide the country or not. In these negotiations, Darfur and other northern areas of the country were largely ignored, which is said to be one of the main reasons that prompted the rebels to attack the government. They also wanted to be included in the power-sharing process, and decided to fight for it (Prendergast, 2005: 3). The agreement “provided the immediate trigger, since the Darfur groups feared they would have little leverage after a North/South deal was concluded” (International Crisis Group, 2004:1a).

In retaliation to the rebels’ attacks, the government, under the command of President Omar al-Bashir, armed the Arab Janjaweed militia to fight against the insurgency. The militia has been accused of crimes against humanity, such as mass killings, rape and the destruction of black African villages (Reynolds, 2007). Described by the United Nations as one of “the world’s worst humanitarian crises” and even as a genocide by the president of the United States, George W. Bush, and by its former Secretary of State Colin Powell (The American Journal of International Law, 2005:266), the conflict in Darfur has already cost the lives of an estimated 200,000 people and displaced more than two million (UN, 2007). Other organisations such as the U.S. State Department-funded Center for International Justice and a study published in the

Journal of Science report even higher numbers (Sudan Tribune, 2006 a), showing controversy not only in the understanding of the roots of the conflict, but even in the process of counting its casualties.

The civil war in Darfur has often been portrayed as an ethnic conflict. Although the violent situation in Darfur indeed presents ethnic characteristics, it appears that these alone fail to clarify the complex nature of the war.

## **1.2 Problem statement**

The “ethnic hatred” discourse has often been proffered in the search for possible explanations for internal conflicts; a tendency that has regularly been present in reports of the media and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) (Keen, 2000:20). Ethnicity differences as causes of civil wars also became a popular theory with academics and the civil society (Turton, 1997:78).

As Conteh-Morgan (2004:193, 206) explains, since the end of the Cold War, there has been a marked growth in ethno-nationalist conflicts, with disputes based on ethnicity and identities becoming one of the main factors capable of disrupting the social order and mobilising people into conflict. In this regard, Africa is one of the continents in the world that seems increasingly affected by ethno-political conflict. An argument used in defence of this hypothesis is that long “tribal, ethnic, and national rivalries” have been kept on hold by the hard regimes of the Cold War, and that with the end of these regimes, those hidden feelings were able to re-emerge (Keen, 2000:20). “Factors that enhance ethnic feelings may include perceptions of shared culture, nationality, language and religion” as Conteh-Morgan (2004:194) observes, with an ethnic group being “a group of people who consider themselves to be distinct from others because of a shared belief of common destiny”.

Whilst these civil wars seem to be generating circumstances even more destructive than wars between states, it seems relevant to take into consideration Fearon & Latin's (2003:77) argument. According to their research, civil wars are not on the increase, but in fact, the occurrence of these have been stable. The authors also claim to have noted a decline in the incidence of these in the latter 1990s, which for them, indicates

that these type of wars are not a result of the end of the Cold War. Nevertheless, independently of the increase or not of these wars in question, the understanding and analysis of their causes is invariably imperative.

The conflict of Darfur is often accounted by the media and other political sources as a clash between black Africans (farmers in general) and Arabs (nomads by activity), and tends to be explained based on the ethnic hatred discourse. As the U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Robert Zoellick said in 2005 about the conflict: “It’s is a tribal war, that has been exacerbated by other conditions, and frankly, I don’t think foreign forces ought to get themselves in the middle of a tribal war of Sudanese” (International Crisis Group, 2006:4 b). A view supported by the Sudanese government, which clearly showed its interest in presenting the situation as an ethnic conflict, as only another “African crisis”, and not as a rebellion movement against the central authorities (Prunier, 2005, 109, 124).

Darfur has more than 80 different ethnic groups, which are normally described as being divided between “Africans” and “Arabs”. They are all Muslims, a key point that differentiates the Darfur conflict from the southern civil war in Sudan. However, as pointed out in a 1985 Minority Rights Group report, this ethnicity classification in Darfur can be questioned, since it “is not in itself clear-cut, given the long history of racial mixing between indigenous non-Arab peoples and the Arabs, who are now distinguished by cultural-linguistic attachment rather than race” (Cook & Mironko, 2006, 127). The actual distinction between “Arabs” and “Africans”, can be better likened to a process of societal marginalisation, economic competition and political manipulation than to racial perceptions (International Commission of Inquiry in Darfur, 2005). In this sense, ethnicity perceptions in Darfur seem to be more the result of a constructive process than primordial feelings, which is one of the lines of thought that this study will follow. It is, however, important to emphasise that ethnicity did play its role in the present conflict, but not as a sole root of the war.

Although ethnic feelings can have the power to prompt people into conflict, under further analysis, such situations that seem to be straightforward can show much more complexity than first assumed. As De Waal (2004:3) defends, “when explained as a war of Arabs against Africans the conflict in region is over-simplified and its deeper

causes are obscured.” O’ Fahey (2004:94) complements this, noting: “Darfur is, environmentally and ethnically, a very complex region that defies simple categorisation.”

The conflict of Darfur is not the only case where the single ethnicity explanation doesn’t seem to be sufficient and as straightforward as it seems. This issue can be identified in cases such as the Rwandan genocide (Turton, 1997:78). As Mueller (1:2000) defends, “specifically, insofar as it is taken to imply a war of all against all and neighbour against neighbour – a condition in which pretty much everyone in one ethnic group becomes the ardent, dedicated, and murderous enemy of everyone in another – ethnic war essentially does not exist.” Ethnic tensions may have a strong influence on wars, but there is no single factor that can fully explain a conflict (Brown, 2001:4).

Taking Yugoslavia and Rwanda as examples, Mueller (2000: 2, 10) says that even in these cases the violence that exploded in both countries didn’t reflect historic hatreds, but was the consequence of the recruitment of a small group of people by the political authorities. In doing so, these local officials were capable of instigating ethnic differences using them as “an ordering device or principle, not as a crucial motivating force”. As Mueller (2000:10) adds, “ethnicity proved essentially to be simply the characteristic around which the perpetrators and the politicians who recruited and encouraged them, happened to array themselves.”

For Brown (2001:19), in order to remain in power and legitimise their control, politicians that seem to be losing authority may find it useful to play the ethnicity card. The use of the ethnicity discourse can be a potent political strategy to manipulate and drive the masses into violence (Turton, 1997:78). As Conteh-Morgan explains (2004:199), according to an instrumentalist approach, “the elites, in the process of ethnicising politics, may redefine even non-ethnic issues in ethnic terms”. Ethnic identities can be distorted and influenced by ethnic elites in order for them to further their own interests. Ancient sentiments are powerful in driving the masses, and if manipulated, have the capacity to divide groups that used to be unified. As Turton (1997: 78) remarks, ethnicity is not “imaginary”, but it does need “historical condition

in order to flourish. It is the special achievement of those who use it as a political source that they are able to construct an identity for their followers.”

As Brown (2001:4) defends, one of the challenges that scholars should concentrate on in their studies, is to examine and identify how conflicts are different from each other and to try to recognise and comprehend the many distinctive factors that may be linked to these wars. Following this argument, it is not enough to replace one explanation such as ancient hatred with another, such as economics, but one should also appreciate how the factors are interrelated and vary from one case to another. Brown (2001:4) argues that “the search for a single factor or set of factors that explains everything is comparable to the search of the Holy Grail – noble but futile”.

The effects of the failure in identifying the different aspects of particular conflicts is that in doing so, it can obscure the vision of those responsible for dealing with these conflicts, such as the international community. For Turton, (1997:80), this was the case in the Rwandan genocide, when the conflict was described as irrational violence between different tribes, and not as a rational and planned operation. Turton (1997:81) completes his argument by saying that when observers buy the single ethnicity explanation, it also makes it easy for them “to ignore or play down the use made of ethnicity by political leaders to mobilise and radicalise their followers.” The use and the acceptance of ethnic hatred as an absolute reason for a root of conflict, is politically and diplomatically exploitable, which “made it easier for the international community to stand aside while millions of people have been killed or made homeless.” In addition, it also takes the focus away from other factors that should be considered, such as why people that used to live together in a relatively peacefully way break into conflict against each other.

### **1.3 Purposes and Significance**

The aim of this study is to examine the Darfur conflict based on this premise that a single factor such as ethnicity cannot clarify the reasons and roots of a civil conflict such as the one that will be investigated. It is my understanding that in order to solve conflicts such as the one in Darfur, it is essential to examine and comprehend the aspects that may be behind the conventional, and in this case, over-simplified ethnic hatred account. Following this argument, this study will focus on two factors that in



my view may have had a strong influence on this conflict: the effects of the 1984/85 droughts on the Darfur society and the consequences of the use of the Arab Janjaweed militia by the government in its counterinsurgency military strategy.

It is vital to emphasise that many other factors could be investigated and possibly linked to the Darfur conflict. A possible example would be the greed discussion, which can be deemed relevant since the rebellion movement seems to have changed over time, with further divisions forming amongst the groups. As reported by the UN news centre (2007:1), at the moment “at least nine distinct groups are fighting the Government”. This prospect could match Collier’s (2000:92) defence that rebellion groups may start movements based on grievance, but afterwards greed and the economic opportunities created by the wars count for more. The fact that the beginning of the conflict coincided with the negotiations of the CPA agreement between the Sudan government and the southern rebel group, or the influence of countries such as Chad and Libya in the Darfur region could also both be, and should be, subjects of research. However, for the purpose and practicability of this research, only the two factors explained in detail will be analysed and their influence on the conflict investigated.

The motivation for selecting these two factors is their direct relation to the issue of ethnicity, and furthermore the possibility of establishing a link between them. The idea is to examine how the droughts may have reinforced the ethnic division in the region, and so analyse how the government in its strategy of war may have used these exacerbated divisions in order to manipulate the conflict along ethnic lines. Should a link be established, it serves as a strong indication that ethnicity in itself is not a single cause of the Darfur conflict, but it is ethnicity coupled with other factors, such as resources competition, economic deprivation and political manipulation that may have led the region into actual war.

As Prunier (2005: 4) outlines, geographic and climatic aspects have always had a strong influence on the way of life in Darfur, with impacts on how the region’s society organised itself and on the area’s economy. The periods of droughts coupled with an over-grazing issue in Darfur contributed to aggravate the already poor situation in the region, which has historically been neglected by the central

government. Land access, which used to be one of the minor issues in the area became an increasingly important matter over the years, especially after the effects of the droughts of 1984/85. As Prunier (2005:86) points out, “since 1985 Darfur had been a time-bomb waiting for a fuse”.

The analysis of the first factor, the drought period of 1984/85, which caused a famine in the area with an estimated food deficit of 39,000 tons (Prunier, 2005:56), has the objective to investigate how this process may have interrupted the previous order of life in Darfur, heightening the present ethnic differences in the region. The goal here is to identify how the scarcity of arable land and water generated by the droughts may have contributed in changing the once relatively peaceful relations between the Arabs and the Africans, creating a dispute over resources and prompting people that once used to share land in a system established by tribal agreements, to fight against each other. As De Waal (2005:xv a) describes, “when the land was plentiful, this was rarely problematic, but the rapid using-up of free cultivable land the degradation of the range meant that land disputes became more common and more bloody in the 1980s.”

Following neo-Malthusian schools of thought, Homer-Dixon (1999: 147) argues that environment scarcity can have significant contributions in the creation of conflict situations, stimulating insurgency movements. When a social group has a historical link to a natural resource that becomes limited, it can bring about a feeling of deprivation and heighten grievances that may motivate violent actions. As Conteh-Morgan (2004: 207) adds, “factors such as population pressure, scarcity of resources, the impact of global political economy, and drought help to aggravate long-standing ethnic tensions and can thus accentuate the effects of economic discrimination along ethnic lines”.

The environment scarcity link with conflict causes is subject to criticism by authors who claim that this approach has weak explanations and a lack of answers, showing little evidence in proving the theory (Richards, 2005:7). However, the environmental conditions that affected Darfur throughout its history do seem to be of great relevance in the understanding of the factors that made the region prone to a conflict situation. As Nyoung says (2007: 8), in order to make sense of the Darfur case it is essential to recognise the role played by natural resource scarcity in contributing to the conflict.

The second factor that will be analysed in this study, the use of the Arab Janjaweed militia, is related to the instrumentalist point of view in evaluating reasons for conflicts. The aim is to verify how the instrumentalist argument - that the elites can manipulate ethnic identities in order to achieve political and economic objectives (Conteh-Morgan, 2004: 199) - can be applied to the Darfur case, based on how the Sudanese government decided to organise its counterinsurgency movement.

It is the objective of this study to evaluate how the use of the Janjaweed militia may have served the government as an “ethnic card”, helping the authorities with their possible intentions of manipulating the conflict along ethnic lines and in doing so, also weakening the insurgency movement. As Keen (2000:32) points out, one of the ways to undermine political opposition is by “deflecting the discontent of one ethnic group by turning their frustrations against another ethnic group”.

The policy tactics of the Sudan government had one key objective: keep power, even if it had to use as its main action the strategy of promoting further division in the country (Prendergast, 2005). As the Commission of Human Rights put it, “what appears to have been an ethnically-based rebellion has been met with an ethnically-based response, building in large part on long-standing, but largely hitherto contained, tribal rivalries” (UN, 2004:4).

#### **1.4 Research Methods**

This study is directly related to theories of conflict, since it questions the absolute applicability of the “ethnic hatred” discourse as a single explanation for the violence in Darfur. In doing so, this research will mainly be based on secondary sources and will be non-empirical in nature. However, it will also investigate aspects related to the real world in Darfur, making empirical enquiries as Mouton (2006: 53) explains. In order to analyse the main issues that will be identified in this study, this research will have multiple characteristics, such as exploratory, descriptive, causal, evaluative and also historical.

Since this study also aims to question matters related to the real world in Darfur, one of the ideal conditions to conduct this research would be in collecting new data (Babbie & Mouton, 2006:75) in the field, meaning travelling to the conflict region in

Darfur. However, since this isn't possible due to safety and economic concerns, this study will be fundamentally based on the analysis of quantitative (mainly statistical) and qualitative secondary data, such as academic journals, books, UN reports, media and NGO materials and possibly government documents. It is important to emphasise that the access to some resources may be limited due to language issues, since a large quantity of the available data may be Arabic, a language beyond my knowledge.

To support and analyse the argument that will be defended throughout this study, the following points will be questioned:

- How did the drought of 1984/85 affect the social order in Darfur?
- Did the environmental scarcity in Darfur have an influence on the rebels' decision to initiate the insurgency movement?
- Did the government of Sudan manipulate the conflict along ethnic lines to further its own interests?
- Is the conflict in Darfur a war of pure "ethnic hatred"?
- Are the two factors focused on in this study part of the roots of the Darfur conflict?
- Can the two factors focused on in this study to be linked with each other?

### **1.5 Preliminary Contents Design**

This study will be divided into five chapters, which are briefly described below:

Chapter 1 (Introduction) will present the subject and focus of this study, which is that the 'ethnic hatred' discourse is not sufficient to explain the Darfur conflict. This chapter will discuss the background and rationale of the study, the problem statement on which this thesis will be based, the purpose and the significance of this research and also the research methods that will be applied in this paper to analyse and verify the hypotheses proposed.

Chapter 2 (Background to the Conflict) will provide an overview and chronological description of the principal facts that occurred during the five years of conflict in Darfur. It will primarily be an account of when and how the conflict started and how it

developed during this period. It will also give the reader a general understanding of the role of the main actors involved in the conflict, such as the Sudanese government, the rebel groups, the Janjaweed, the AU, the UN and other general international forces (US, China, Chad, etc.)

In Chapter 3 (Heating up – The Role of the Environment in the Darfur Conflict), this study will delve back into the history of Darfur to analyse the effects that the drought of 1984/85 had on the Darfur society, and how it contributed to an increased poverty situation in the region. In this chapter, the previous societal order in Darfur, of cooperation between Africans and Arabs, will also be discussed with the objective of evaluating how the environmental scarcity in the region altered this system. Aspects of identity formation in Darfur will also be examined in this chapter. Although this subject is also directly related to the issue of identity manipulation discussed in chapter 4, it seems important to present the aspect of identity formation at this stage, since in understanding this, it will clarify for the reader how environmental factors influenced ethnicity in Darfur. Thus, possibly creating the necessary conditions for the government to later manipulate the conflict along ethnic lines. In addition, topics related to this issue, such as land ownership and the lack of government programs to improve agricultural productivity (the main economic activity in Darfur) will be examined.

Chapter 4 (The Janjaweed – An Ethnic Weapon of War) will analyse the military strategy adopted by the government of Sudan and the outcomes of its use of the Janjaweed militia (although the government has denied its involvement with the Janjaweed, there is sufficient evidence to demonstrate a link between them). The intention of this phase is to evaluate how the use of the Janjaweed by the government may have contributed to creating a conflict with a strong ethnic nature. It will also explore the reasons why the government may have had an interest in portraying the conflict in this light, thus exacerbating the ethnic differences already present in Darfur.

The final chapter (Chapter 5 – Conclusion) will provide a summary of the findings made during the study and an analysis of how the factors focused on during this research may have contributed to the creation of a conflict in Darfur, showing that the

violence in the region was not only the result of “ethnic hatred”, but from a combination of factors, such as environmental aspects and governmental manipulation of the masses. In this final phase, the study will make considerations for the future, based on the aspects verified in this research and also conclude whether the argument defended in this research proves to be valid. In so doing, this chapter will also discuss which changes could be adopted in dealing with conflicts such as the one in Darfur in order to achieve peace.

## **Chapter 2: Background to the Conflict**

Sudan's North-South conflict – number of casualties: 2 million according to rebel accounts. Displaced people: 4 million (CIA, 2007). UN statistics from Darfur's conflict: 200,000 people dead, more than 2 million displaced (UN Human Rights Council, 2007: 15) When putting these figures in contrast, it can make the conflict in Darfur seem of minor significance in relation to the north-south civil war that has plagued Sudan for 21 years. And when drawing comparisons, the conflict in Darfur may also seem of smaller scale than the conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), as Mandami (2007:11) argues when questioning why the world is paying so much attention to the situation in Darfur and not in the DRC, where “the numbers killed are estimated in the millions rather than the hundreds of thousands”. In an interview with CNN in 2004, the Sudanese president Gen. Omar Ahmad al-Bashir also used these statistics to criticise what he classified as “exaggerated” international involvement in Darfur: “Consider that the population of Darfur is 5 million and you take the numbers they cite of a million (UN estimate of number of refugees at the time), that means 4 million people are not affected by the war, which means that the majority of the region and its citizens are living their normal life” (CNN, 2004:1).

It is not the purpose of this study to question these arguments, but even taking these comparisons into consideration, it is still arguable that 200,000 deaths should be a high enough figure to attract the world's attention and prompt further investigation into the deeper causes of the Darfur conflict, as much as should be given in relation to the DRC, or any other conflict. In this sense, statistics may only tell part of the story. They might not always make completely transparent the political characteristics, economic interest and other issues that can lie behind the causes of civil wars such as in Darfur. It appears that statistics, although essential in order to communicate the scale of casualties, and also crucial in cases such as distinguishing between acts of genocide or not, might not be sufficient to evaluate the importance of this conflict in terms of Sudan's national context.

Whilst the numbers of casualties in Darfur are already high, but not yet on the same scale as Sudan's southern conflict, the impact on the country's political scene may be even stronger. As Iyob & Khadiagala (2006:160) point out, “the upsurge of violence in Darfur was a reminder that Sudan's conflict was never entirely a north-south or a Muslim-Christian struggle”. The crisis created by the division of the Muslim



community, which was reflected through the Darfur conflict, is also noted by Prunier (2005:xi): “in Khartoum the government panicked because it suddenly felt that the Muslim family was splintering, potentially with enormous consequences. The violence of the response was directly linked to the magnitude of the fear.”

When exploring the main facts from the last 5 years of warfare in Darfur and certain aspects of the country’s history, it is possible to identify that there are many more contradictory interests involved in the Darfur conflict than what the scale of casualties can possibly demonstrate. In order to comprehend the interplay between these essential factors in the conflict, this chapter will provide an overview of the chief occurrences that form the background of this civil war. A particular focus will be given to the characteristics and actions of the most important players in the conflict, be they at an internal or external level, who are core to the premise of this thesis – that the civil war in Darfur goes beyond the “ethnic hatred” explanation. An example of an external player, is the international community, whose actions towards the conflict seem to have been influenced by economic and political interests, as well as by the Sudanese government's strategy of portraying the conflict as a common ‘tribal’ dispute between “Arabs” and “Africans”, rather than as a rebellion.

As Turton (1997) says, when the international community accepts the single “ethnic hatred” explanation for conflicts, they indirectly give support to the use of ethnicity as a means of political manipulation. In the case of Darfur, it would seem that, at least at the outset of the conflict, a large part of the international community's response to the war has been based on their belief, or pretence of credence to the ethnic justifications for the conflict. For several reasons, as will be examined in this chapter, it appears that the international community's actions have followed Turton's (1997:81) argument that its failure in identifying the causes behind the apparent ethnic confrontations “has made it easy for these observers to ignore or play down the use made of ethnicity by political leaders to mobilise and radicalise their followers.”

The terms “Arab” and “African” are used throughout this study in quotes due to the controversy attached to them, since the notion of identity in Darfur is considerably blurred due to a history of intermarriage and fluid relations between different groups. While this issue will be clarified in chapter 3, when the topic of identity formation in

Darfur will be further discussed, it is important to keep in mind that although the community in Darfur has generally been described as consisting of “African” or “Arab” tribes, this classification seems to have been a recently constructed concept, as De Waal (2005 a) says. As it will be demonstrated, prior studies have verified that in a not-so-distant past, people from “Arab” tribes would often move to “African” tribes and vice-versa, depending more on economic interests than identity perceptions.

In order to facilitate a general understanding of the background of this conflict, this study will commence with a brief analysis of the two major rebels groups in Darfur and of the Sudanese government. It is essential to note that there are presently multiple other rebel factions acting in Darfur, many of them originating from the split in the initial groups that will be discussed next. The subsequent section will not focus on these offshoot groups, but rather be cited along the conflict’s chronological evolution, which is the central part of this thesis stage. In addition, another crucial actor – the Janjaweed, which is the militia allegedly recruited along ethnic “Arab” tribal lines and armed by the government to fight the rebels in their counterinsurgency movement – will not be discussed at this point. However, as previously outlined, it will receive detailed attention in chapter 4.

## **2.1 The Main Actors – Rebels and Rulers**

As previously explained, although the roots of the conflict in Darfur can be traced back far further, the actual warfare in Darfur is often reported as having started in February 2003. In some instances, even a date is cited – the 26<sup>th</sup> February, the day that the Darfur Liberation Front (DLF), later to become the Sudan Liberation Movement/Army (SLM/A), claimed the responsibility for an attack on the city of Golo, in the district headquarters of Jebel Marra – the central region of Darfur (Flint & de Waal, 2005:76). At the time, the government’s response to the attacks was one of denial. “These are not rebels but bandits”, stated the spokesman for the Sudanese embassy in Nairobi, Muhammad Ahmad Dirdeiry, who also described reports of the attacks as an “exaggeration” (IRIN, 2003 a).

However, there are accounts that attacks of rebels against government institutions such as police stations and army posts were already visible in Darfur before February

2003, and that the government had knowledge of the insurgency movement since June 2002, when a police station had been the target of rebels (Flint & de Waal, 2005:76). The International Commission of Enquiry on Darfur (2004:54) also confirms having knowledge of evidence showing that the government and the Janjaweed militia were clashing against the rebel movement since 2001.

According to Flint & de Waal (2005:76), it would be difficult to put an exact date on the conflict's conception, but the most accurate estimate would be on the 21<sup>st</sup> July 2001. This was the day that Darfur's Fur and Zaghawa tribes held a meeting in Abu Gamra and decided to unify forces against the government, forming the rebel group SLM/A. Later in November of the same year, the two tribes managed to engage the support of another tribe in Darfur, the Masalit. However, at the time, they concluded that it would be wise not to make the movement official before they could acquire political and logistical support. (Flint & de Waal, 2005:76).

### **2.1.1 The Sudan Liberation Movement/ Army – SLM/A**

The Fur, who is the largest “non-Arab” tribe in Darfur, was the first group to start organising themselves as a resistance movement (Flint & de Waal, 2005:76). It was in 1996 that a group of Fur activists held their first meetings in Khartoum, Sudan's capital, and started to buy ammunition for distribution amongst Fur self-defence groups in Darfur. With the constant objective of organising the movement in a wider context than solely a fight by the Fur, the group sought the support of other tribes (Flint & de Waal, 2005:71,72). The first alliance was with the Zaghawa, another “non-Arab” tribe located in the northern region of Darfur and formed mainly of camel nomads. The other tribe that joined the movement subsequently, the Masalit, is situated in Darfur's southern region. During the conflict, according to sources of the International Crisis Group (2004:19 b), the SLM/A has also recruited members from other tribes, not only “Africans”, but also “Arabs”. A point which indicates that although this rebel group is in the majority formed of “African” tribes, in some instances, its causes have also appealed to “Arab” tribes.

As described by Flint & de Waal (2005: 66), even with a large presence of Zaghawas, the rebel movement was formed mostly of farmers from Darfur, “who were not political animals, but who knew injustice when they saw it and who, after years of rising conflict with the government and government-backed militias, finally felt they had nothing left to lose...these were not the ‘armed bandits’ the government insisted they were.” Among examples of rebel fighters are former members of Sudan’s army and police force, professionals such as lawyers and doctors and young graduates. (Flint & de Waal, 2005: 67, 68).

Although the rebel movement was already in action prior to 2003, it was shortly after the SLA occupied the city of Golo in Jebel Marra that they made their first public political statement. In the declaration divulged on March of 2003 they indicated that their cause was not against the “Arabs”, but it was a fight in support of the rights of the people that the Sudanese government had been neglecting. They claimed that their insurgency movement was not based on ethnic differences, but on grievances originating from a central government policy of power concentration and marginalisation towards Darfur, an area of the country that suffered from a general lack of development in terms of roads, schools, medical support and more (Flint & de Waal, 2005).

It was at this time that the DLF changed its name to Sudan Liberation Movement/Army (SLM/A), in order to reflect the insurgency ideal. For Flint & de Waal (2005:82), this more organised political attitude was one of the signs that showed the link between the SPLA rebel group from the southern civil war and the SLM/A from Darfur.

Whilst the Darfurian rebels deny any involvement with the southern group, for Flint & de Waal (2005:82) the new political stature of the SLM/A indicated that they were receiving “logistics, political orientation and, most critically in the SPLA’s view, the absolute imperative of maintaining unity”. The SPLA’s orientation followed the concept that the Darfurians should fight for their grievances, instead of being included in the Naivasha process, which was negotiating a peace deal for the conflict in the south. According to sources from the International Crisis Group (2004:20 b), there is

also evidence that the SLM/A received support from the SPLA in the acquisition of arms and members' training.

The capacity of the SLM/A to address the causes of diverse groups that could identify their own grievances with the rebel movement ideal was considered one of the main initial achievements of the resistance group. This can also be seen as a primary reason why the rebel movement presented such a large threat to the government, which in a response to maintain power, opted in using the Janjaweed in its counterinsurgency movement, ignoring the signs that indicated that this option could result in a further drastic split of the Darfurian society, with violent results (International Crisis Group, 2004:19 b).

In the rebels' Political Declarations, it was clear that their intention was to acquire the support of all groups, "Arabs" or "Africans" that have been marginalised by the political and economic government policies in Darfur. At the time, the declaration was signed by Minni Arkou Minnawi, former Secretary General of the SLM/A, now the leader of the SLA/MM a division of the same movement that split in early 2006.

*"The SLM/A shall struggle to realise a new system of rule that fully respects the cultural diversity in Sudan and creates new democratic conditions for cultural dialogue and cross-fertilisation, generating a new view of the Sudanese identity based on Sudanism. Sudanism will provide the Sudanese with the necessary space, regardless of whether they are Arabs or Africans, Christians or Muslims, Westerners or Easterners, Southerners or Northerners to achieve greater cohesiveness on the basis of the simple fact of being Sudanese. This would require restructuring of power and an equal and equitable distribution of both power and wealth in all their dimensions."* (SLM/A, 2003)

Although there are adequate signs to indicate that grievances bred by a history of marginalisation towards Darfur were indeed the main driving forces behind the rebels' formation, it is important to keep in mind the risk of portraying the notion of victims and violence perpetrators in a "romantic" way and the rebels as "freedom fighters" as Kuperman (2006: 1) criticises. This point of view is not only relevant to the SLM/A, but also to the other many rebel groups that have emerged during the years of conflict.

Kuperman may go too far and may not be entirely accurate when stating that the conflict is the rebels' fault since they were the ones who initiated it. However, it is important not to ignore that the rebels have also been responsible for countless acts of violence, with most of these, especially at the outset of the conflict, aimed towards government institutions. Yet, as time passes and the conflict becomes further manipulated along ethnic lines, more reports surface demonstrating a change in the rebels' attitude, with attacks by these groups against civilians and humanitarian agencies' vehicles becoming commonplace.

Whilst these cases have been smaller in extent than the abuses committed by the government and the Janjaweed (International Commission of Inquiry on Darfur, 2005: 69), there is a sense that the use of similar tactics to the government militias is growing amongst rebel groups, who are also becoming increasingly more divided. During 2006, Lt. Col. Wisdon Bleboo of the African Union (AU) said that "right now, we don't have any security problem with the government forces or with the Janjaweed...it is only the fighting between the rebel factions that is causing us trouble" (Polgreen, 2006:1).

Indeed, the division amongst rebels from the SLM/A and other insurgent groups such as the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) around issues such as leadership, their lack of ability in reaching a common strategy, arguments over peace negotiation processes and their political inexperience are all seen as weak points that contribute to the failure of the movement. Aside from the government's attitude, these factors have been part of the many constraints in finding an ending to the conflict; constraints that seem to deepen as time passes (Flint & de Waal, 2005: 86).

### **2.1.2 The Justice and Equality Movement (JEM)**

The origins of the second main rebel group in Darfur, the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) dates back to 1993. Distinct groups from the same movement started to meet in different areas of Darfur, such as in Al Fasher, Kordofon and Khartoum. (Flint & de Waal, 2005: 92). Originally, the JEM chiefly comprised another faction of the Zaghawa, the Kobe – which has stronger links with Chad than the Zaghawa group that fight alongside the SLM/A. However, over the years the

group has also acquired a broader tribal representation in Darfur. Its activities are mostly concentrated in the northern region of Darfur. (International Crisis Group, 2004: 20 b).

The rebel's group leader is Khalil Ibrahim, a former Minister of Education in the Darfur province who has direct links with the Islamic movement in Sudan. It is said that Khalil Ibrahim has close ties with Dr Hassan El Turabi, who is the key person behind the Islamic movement's origin in Sudan. Turabi also used to be the Secretary General of the Congress Party; but was dismissed from this position after being accused by the government of attempting to organise a plot to overthrow the current president Omar al-Bashir (Prunier, 2005:84,93). Note that more details about Turabi and his links to the government will be given in the next section of this study, which will deal specifically with the Sudanese government.

Although both Ibrahim and Turabi deny the latter having any involvement with the JEM, there are indications that the rebel movement is indeed backed by Turabi (International Commission of Inquiry, 2004:39). The supposed link between Turabi and the JEM group is often mentioned as being one of the main reasons why the conflict in Darfur is considered by the government to be a major threat. It is supposed that the government's fear is that Turabi is using the rebel movement and the conflict to force his way back into power (Human Rights Watch, 2004:11).

The JEM was officially announced as a political movement in 2001, through a press release published in the Netherlands. This rebel group's ideal is very similar to the SLM/A. According to the International Commission of Inquiry in Darfur (2005:60), leaders from both rebel groups stated during interviews made by the Commission that their aim is to attack the government and their fight is not a tribal one against the "Arabs". However, in addition to the JEM's call for an end to the marginalisation process, where they claim that the majority of the country is ignored, this group also has a stronger national political agenda than the SLM/A, which in contrast, has a superior military capacity (Flint & de Waal, 2005: 93).

On the JEM official website, in an article entitled the "Proposal By the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) For Peace in Sudan in General & Darfur in Particular", the

rebel movement makes it clear that their focus is directed at the national scene. The group's political strategy is broad and their ambitions are not restricted to a regional sphere, as the federal system proposed by the JEM demonstrates:

*“The implementation of a federal system of governance for all the six regions of the Sudan which shall allow for democratic self-governing by every region, within a united Sudan. Such regions are: the Central Region, Northern Region, Southern Region, Eastern Region, Darfur Region and Kurdofan Region. The status of the national capital (Khartoum) shall be considered as a special seventh region.”*  
(JEM, no date)

An example of this group's strong political agenda is their supposed authorship of “The Black Book – Imbalance of Power and Wealth in Sudan”, an anonymous manifesto published in May 2002 with details about the government's strategy of political and economic marginalisation towards areas away from the central power of Sudan. This publication, which has been distributed in Sudan without official consent, is said to have brought to people's attention, especially in terms of Darfur, how multiple Sudanese governments have neglected them (Flint & de Waal, 2005: 93). It seems relevant to note that this book, which states the common grievances shared by the Sudanese people, was published at around the same time as the split between Turabi and the government, thus, being another possible indication of Turabi's link with the JEM.

Although the current Sudanese government seems to be largely responsible for shaping the conflict in Darfur, it is essential for the reader to have a general knowledge of prior key Sudanese leaders, since the policies applied by these former governments also appear to have contributed to present circumstances.

### **2.1.3 Sudan's Government – A Short Account from Independence until Today**

Since its independence from British rule in 1956, Sudan has had democratic governments for 10 years, which were alternated by military regimes (International Commission of Inquiry on Darfur, 2005:18). The first two years of parliamentary democracy were soon after independence, but they were interrupted by a coup that



brought to power General Ibrahim Abbud in 1958. The ideas of Arabisation and Islamisation as a way of unifying Sudan were strong on Abbud's agenda. His government gave full support to the divulgation of the Arab language and Arab culture in the country (Collins, 2005:33).

The concepts of Arabisation and Islamisation that were being imposed in the country as a whole, by the central government from the north, brought ideological clashes with the population from the south region of the country, which is Christian in its majority (Collins, 2005:34). As Collins (2005:34) describes, "to encourage the growth of Islam, the military government constructed mosques, established Islamic schools and subsidised Muslim propaganda under the direction of the Department of Religious Affairs. Christian missionary activities were increasingly restricted under 'The Missionary Societies Act' of 1962 and two years later all Christian missionaries were summarily expelled."

In terms of Darfur, as Prunier (2005:38) says, "the feeling was that the regime made no difference: civilian or military, the men in power in Khartoum paid no attention to their distant colony." However, at the same time, as Flint & de Waal (2005: 14) note, the people in Darfur had for multiple generations "assimilated, almost entirely peacefully and voluntarily, to a Sudanese political, economic and cultural entity based on the River Nile." They assimilated with no complaints the notion of 'becoming Sudanese', which was being propagated by the central government.

Abbud's attempt to impose an Arab and Islamic culture in the southern region of the country was a failure. Protests spread throughout the country, and in 1964 Abbud resigned from his post and a transitional government was established. Elections were held in 1965, bringing to power the civilian government of Muhammad Mahjub (Collins, 2005:34). But the new government didn't last for long. In May 1969 Mahjub was deposed through a coup led by Colonel Jaafar Al-Nimeiry. In 1972, it was Nimeiry that signed the Addis Ababa agreement with the rebels from southern Sudan, putting an end to the first North-South civil conflict. According to the agreement, the southern region was conceded some level of autonomy in terms of self-government (Collins, 2005:35).

However, some factions from northern Sudan, such as the sectarian groups and Muslim Brothers, didn't approve of the Addis Ababa agreement. They felt that the agreement conceded too much. With the support from the south, Nimeiry managed to survive two coup attempts in 1975 and 1976, but he knew that his government was under threat unless he could gain the opposition's support. It was at this point that Hassan al-Turabi, the Muslim Brothers leader, was brought to the government and later appointed Attorney General. He soon started to make changes to the legal system, moving towards an Islamic reform. In 1983, the Sharia rule for Muslims was introduced (Johnson, 2000:56). As Johnson (2000:56) points out, Nimeiry, "by championing Islamic reform, tried to steal a march on the Islamic components to his regime, and thus guarantee his own political survival." Among the regulations implemented by Nimeiry at the time were the elimination of traditional tribal administration and the elaboration of a new Land Act, which had a significant impact on the land system in Darfur. These two policies from Nimeiry's government and their influence on Darfur will be further discussed in chapter 3.

The discovery of oil in the south of Sudan at this time gave Nimeiry's government an additional reason to enforce its Islamic reform to the detriment of the south's autonomy. Soon the Addis Ababa agreement started to collapse. The division of the southern area into three regions in June 1983 can be seen as an example of a violation of the agreement, in order for the government to regain control over the oil-rich southern area. This division was made without the approval of the affected population. After 11 years of peace, the discontented south resurrected a civil war in the region, which lasted for 21 years (Collins, 2005:37).

Nimeiry's government remained in power for 17 years, and as Collins (2005:41) describes, during this long period he managed to "deftly manipulate the diverse ethnic, political and constituencies that comprise the largest country in Africa to survive more than twenty attempts to overthrow him and his regime." However, the pressure of the conflict in the south and the lack of support for Nimeiry's government, which became increasingly isolated, led his regime to an end. He was overthrown by the military in 1985 and a state of emergency was declared. Nimeiry, who at the time was on a government mission to the U.S., was sent to exile in Egypt (Collins, 2005:56, 57).

After Nimeiry's fall, a Transitional Military Council was installed under the leadership of General Abed Rahman Siwar al-Dahab. Elections were held in 1986 and Sadiq al-Mahdi, an Umma Party leader, became the prime minister. His government lasted for four years. In Darfur, al-Mahdi's government was marked by the growing influence of international politics in the region, with a strong Libyan and Chad military presence in the area. Although this international influence is of essential importance in Darfur's history, this study will not delve into its details, given that these matters are beyond the main scope of this thesis. Sadiq al-Mahdi's failure to solve the southern conflict issue and address the growing frustration from the North made way for another Sudanese coup in 1989 – this time led by the current president of the country – Colonel Omar Hassan al-Bashir (Johnson, 2000:84).

Al-Bashir had full assistance from the Muslim Brotherhood to move into power and the new regime was heavily influenced by the National Islamic Front from Hassan al-Turabi. However, in order to obtain support for the coup from Egypt and Saudi Arabia, in the early days, the new regime purported not to have any link with Turabi, who was even sent to prison together with other members from the former government (Flint & de Waal, 2005: 26). As Prunier (2005:68) says, Turabi “was officially under arrest but he came out at night to attend political meetings and plan the new regime's strategy.”

With Turabi's participation, during the first years of al-Bashir's reign, the Islamic movement was further strengthened (O'Fahey, 1996). A movement that since the 1960s until today, as O'Fahey (1996:259) states, has been “politically ideological” in its nature, representing an “expression of a northern Sudanese ethnicity's determination to preserve its control over as much as possible of Sudan, not least the Nile Valley.”

In 1996 elections were held once more in Sudan and all opposition parties in the country boycotted the process, with al-Bashir being re-elected. The National Congress party, formerly the National Islamic Front, also received the most seats in parliament – 340 of the 360 total seats (International Commission of Inquiry on Darfur, 2005:19). In 1998, a new constitution was passed. It was mainly drafted by Turabi, who became the Speaker of Parliament in the same year (Flint & de Waal, 2005:30). But one year

later, in 1999, the government was split in a power struggle. Turabi attempted to pass a bill with the intention to reduce the President's power. In reaction, General al-Bashir dissolved the parliament, taking all the power from Turabi, and declared a state of emergency (International Commission of Inquiry on Darfur, 2005:19). In 2001, after Turabi's new party, the Popular National Congress signed an agreement with the southern rebel group - the SPLM, Turabi was accused of planning to overthrow the President and was detained (BBC, 2007a).

As Prunier (2005:84) explains, although Turabi is out of the government, his fight for power is far from over. Turabi, with his "prestige and charismatic personality", has high influence in diverse sections of the country, including the militias and the rural areas of Sudan, and amongst them – Darfur. As mentioned in the last section of this study, albeit denied, Turabi has been strongly linked with the JEM's rebel Darfur group. As Prunier (2005:84) resumes, Turabi now plays a role not less important than the one he used to play before in Sudan's current political scene - the opposition role. And much of the government's violent reaction to the insurgency movement can be attributed to the risks that Turabi as an opponent can represent to the central power.

## **2.2 Response to the first Rebel Attacks**

The intensity of the rebels' initial attacks in 2001 on official institutions took the government by surprise. In response, and in one of the first attempts to solve the matter, the Northern Darfur governor at the time, General Ibrahim Suleiman tried to hold discreet negotiations with the rebel groups (Flint & de Waal, 2005:97). As Flint & de Waal (2005:97) point out, Suleiman "believed the rebels' demands were negotiable." In 2002, in order to pacify the situation, Musal Hilal, the alleged head of the Janjaweed militia used by the government in its counterinsurgency and 23 other people who were supposed to be involved with crimes in Darfur were sent to prison by Suleiman. However, the tension in the area continued to rise (Flint & de Waal, 2005:97). As previously mentioned, in February 2003 the SLM/A attacked the city of Golo, in the district headquarters of Jebel Marra, and soon after publicly announced the movement.

Although the government kept with its practice of denial of the insurgency movement, insisting on describing the rebels as mere “bandits” (IRIN, 2003 a), an official mission was informally sent to Darfur soon after the attacks in February 2003 (Prunier:2005:92). As Prunier (2005:92) says, “true, the mission was only headed by the President’s Transport Committee, Idris Yusuf, a choice which showed that the government still thought it could get away with promising a ‘few more hundred kilometres of good roads’ to people it felt were backward peasants.”

Meanwhile, an informal ceasefire that had been negotiated by Suleiman was broken by an “Arab” militia attack. They assaulted Saleh Dakoro, an 70 year old Masalit sheikh very well know in the region, who died at the hospital shortly afterwards (Flint & de Waal, 2005:98). In a statement, the US-based Masalit Community in Exile claimed that the ambush against their tribal leader, made whilst he was travelling in Darfur, was an action of the government-armed militia, and that this type of action was becoming a usual practice in the region (IRIN, 2003 b). This alleged attack at such an early stage of the conflict is an example of the pattern of violence that would be used by the government until today, as will be observed in the course of this study.

The death of Dakoro was seen as a major affront by the rebels, who counter-attacked in response. By the end of March, they had gained control of a town on the Chad border, capturing arms and equipment from its fort. Though always maintaining to the international community that the situation in Darfur was only a case of ethnic tribal clashes, the Sudanese President’s reaction indicated that he was aware of the insurgency movement, and that a prospect of peace wasn’t in his plans: “Khartoum will not negotiate with those who took up arms in Darfur and denied the authority of the state and the law”, affirmed al-Bashir (Flint & de Waal, 2005:98, 99).

Despite the President’s threat of ‘crushing’ the insurgency movement, in April 2003, during a SLM/A – JEM joint mission, the Al-Fasher air base was attacked, resulting in the biggest lost to the Sudan air force in its history. According to the government, it lost four Antonov bombers and helicopter gunships. The rebels claimed the numbers were higher – seven in total (Flint & de Waal, 2005:99). As Iyob & Khadiagala (2006:151) point out, “the coordinated attacks by the two movements revealed the inadequacy of the government military, hence the decision to rely primarily on the

Janjaweed, reinforced by the helicopter gunships and bombers from the national air force.” Additionally, there was a sense that the government couldn’t trust the army. The reason being that most soldiers from Sudan’s army, which was already more than overstretched due to clashes in the southern region of the country, came from the Darfur region. As Prunier (2005:59) observes “precise statistics on the subject are lacking for obvious reasons”.

As the rebel movement expanded throughout the country, the government increased its militia response. General Suleiman was dismissed and in June 2003, Musal Hilal was brought back to Darfur to direct the Janjaweed militia, which would allegedly be widely used in the government’s counterinsurgency operations (Flint & de Waal, 2005:102). Note again that more details from the militia organisation process and further analysis of the effects of its use as a conflict weapon will be given in chapter 4.

Whilst the situation in Darfur was flaring up with the government’s collaborative action with the Janjaweed, the international community was pre-occupied with the crisis in southern Sudan, and the reaching of a deal to end the longest civil conflict in Africa’s history. The focus of the international community on the north-south peace negotiations made room for the government to develop its military strategy in Darfur without drawing too much attention (Flint & de Waal, 2005:32). In this regard, the denial of the insurgency movement whilst labelling the conflict as a ‘tribal war’ also seems to have been an intentional government approach to gain time, as will be examined next.

### **2.3 The North-South Peace Negotiations**

As mentioned in chapter 1, the beginning of the conflict in Darfur overlapped with the culmination of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) negotiations, in which Darfur was ignored. A factor that has been pointed out as one of the reasons that prompted the rebel movement, since they also wanted to acquire their rights to power-sharing (International Crisis Group, 2004 a).

Essentially, in respect of the international scene, Prunier (2005:88,89) observes that since the split of the government, with Turabi's dismissal from post, the government was trying to sell an image to the outside world that it was moving forward to a more moderate political position. The terrorist attack of September 11, 2001 also created an opportunity for president al-Bashir to show his good intentions and offer the U.S. total support in its war on terror. As Prunier (2005:89) says, "President Bush and his aides quickly saw the benefits, both practical and ideological, to be derived from a change of policy towards Sudan, and Washington began collaborating closely with Khartoum on the issue of terrorism." Simultaneously, the presence and pressure of the U.S. in the north-south peace negotiations started to grow, as well as the apparent government backing of the process, which had also garnered the support of other countries such as Norway, Britain, France and Kenya.

In fact, remaining in power without conceding too much is seen as one of the stimulating factors that took the Sudanese government to the negotiation table (Flint & de Waal, 2005:32). However, it would appear that, in terms of Darfur, the government had an ulterior motive in demonstrating its good intentions towards the north-south negotiations – manipulation of the international community. As Prendergast (2005:1) puts it, "the Sudanese regime is adept at using one conflict to stoke the fire of another, and has often exploited the international community's tendency to focus on one conflict at a time rather than taking a holistic approach."

Since the international community was more concerned with concluding the southern civil conflict, it played into the government's hands. One of the hopes was that the peace in the south and the arrival in the government of the SPLM southern rebel leader John Garang as Vice-President would eventually help to solve the problems in Darfur. This ideal was greatly hampered by Garang's death in a helicopter crash in 2005 (International Crisis Group, 2007:8). But as Prunier (2005:97) resumes, the government's intentions were to end the rebellion in Darfur before the conclusion of the negotiations of power-sharing with the SPLA, and for this end, "the government had clearly decided on a military solution to the crisis."

In addition, as part of the government's strategy to divert the international attention from its military actions, the notion was communicated that the conflict was solely

based on ethnicity, and was not an insurgency (Prunier, 2005:VIII). As Prunier (2005:VIII) says, “the Sudanese government, fearing that it might trigger a military intervention on its territory, began desperately struggling to convince the world that Darfur was simply a case of ethnic conflict gone out of control.” An approach that the government would maintain, even with the insurgency characteristics of the conflict becoming harder to be deny, due to the beginning of the peace negotiations talks (International Crisis Group, 2006).

#### **2.4 The Abeche Talks**

As the violence escalated on the ground, the main parties involved in the Darfur crisis took the matter to be discussed to the negotiation tables of the town of Abeche, in Sudan’s neighbouring country, Chad. By then, Chad already had around 65,000 refugees from Darfur on its land (UNHCR, 2003). The large presence of refugees in Chad opened a humanitarian, political and security crisis in the country. Feeling the impact of the Darfur conflict on its house, Chadian president Idriss Deby, who has strong links with the Zaghawa tribe – one of the main groups involved in the Darfur rebel movement – took the initiative of mediating what would be the first of many international ceasefire meetings intended to solve the Darfur conflict (Rankumise, 2006:4).

The talks in Abeche resulted in a ceasefire being signed on 3<sup>rd</sup> September 2003. The government of Sudan and the SLM/A rebel group agreed to put a hold on the fighting. According to the agreement, during a period of 45 days that would be used for further negotiations, both parties would put down their arms and prisoners of war from both sides would be released (IRIN, 2003 c). The meetings didn’t have the participation of the JEM, who claimed not to trust the Chad government as a mediator due to its close relations with the Sudanese government (International Crisis Group, 2004:21 b). However, only two days later, the SLM/A claimed that the government had broken the ceasefire, with three attacks against the rebel groups’ camps and also civilian villages (IRIN, 2003 d). The government denied the accusation, which had no confirmation from independent sources. “The ceasefire signed in the Darfur area is still holding”, said the spokesperson of the Sudanese Embassy in London at the time (IRIN, 2003 e).



The ceasefire expired and new talks were held in Abeche. The meetings nearly didn't reach a conclusion due to the SLM/A's demand for the presence of international observers other than the Chadian authorities. The rebel group's spokesperson, Ahmad Abd al-Shafi said at the time that the Chad authorities were "friends of the government" and that they needed "neutral observers from different countries." The government refused: "our position is that we don't need to internationalise the issue", answered Muhammad Ahmad Dirdeiry – Sudan's Deputy Ambassador to Kenya, adding that the crisis in Darfur was "a local conflict". Amongst other demands from the rebels was for the government to cease referring to them as "bandits" and acknowledge the presence of an insurgency movement in Darfur. Even with these contradictions, and the fight still continuing in Darfur, the ceasefire was extended by another month (IRIN, 2003 f).

Meanwhile, the government began to block the access of humanitarian aid to the Darfur region. According to the former UN Humanitarian Coordinator for Sudan Mukesh Kapila, it wasn't possible to provide valid reasons why travel permits to the area were not being granted. However, he said that "the reports and allegations of human rights violations are too persistent, too systematic and too repetitive from different sources to not be given credibility", adding that "some of the denials of access may well be related to the discomfort of the parties concerned to allow international witnesses." The response from the acting governor in Nyala, Adam Idris Al Silaik was that the situation in Darfur was "under control", that the Janjaweed militia were a "group of thieves" and didn't have any link with the government (IRIN, 2003 g).

Nevertheless, in Darfur, the situation didn't appear "under control", indicating that the government seemed to be trying to conceal the truth, whilst gaining time to further develop its military counterinsurgency. According to a report from the Save the Children NGO, at the time, more than 550,000 people were already in need of food aid in the region (Save the Children, 2003).

A new round of negotiations planned to happen in Abeche in December were cancelled. It is said that the government walked away and refused to meet the rebel groups because of their demands. The rebels were asking for the establishment of a

link between the talks related to Darfur and the peace negotiations that were being held to solve the southern conflict, the presence of international observers and the formation of an international committee to investigate war crimes in Darfur (Prunier, 2004:109). In the same month, the government showed that it was still following its strategy of denial of the crisis in Darfur: “There is no rebellion in Darfur, just a local conflict among specific tribes...those with their own agenda are trying to give a very sad view of what is happening”, declared the Information Minister Dr Al Zhawi Ibrahim Malik (IRIN, 2003 h).

The year of 2003 came to an end and no deal was reached to solve the conflict. The new year saw a declaration from president al-Bashir that would clearly indicate that the government indeed had links with the Janjaweed: “We will use all available means, the Army, the police, the mujahedeen, the horsemen, to get rid of the rebellion” he said on TV (Prunier, 2005:109). Many similar declarations would follow throughout the conflict, and other evidence of the relation between the militia and the government would materialise, which will be further analysed in chapter 4.

Shortly after, on February 2004, another statement from president al-Bashir caused surprise. At this point, he declared that the war in Darfur was over: “The government has undertaken its full duties and responsibilities through decisive action in the face of these events and managed to restore security and protect human life and property”. Furthermore, he promised the rebels amnesty if they would give up their arms, assured protection to refugees on their way back to Darfur and said that humanitarian assistance would have unrestricted access to the region from then on. The rebels called the President’s statement a fake “propaganda” (IRIN, 2004 a). As proof that the Darfur war wasn’t over, reports of new clashes on the ground never ceased, the numbers of victims and refugees continued to grow and, soon after, the situation in Darfur was described as the “world’s greatest humanitarian crisis” by Mukesh Kapila, UN Humanitarian Coordinator for Sudan (IRIN, 2004 b). It was also at this time that international interest in the situation started to rise, with a resulting stronger involvement of foreign observers in peace negotiations.

## **2.5 The N'djamena Talks, Addis Ababa Negotiations and the AU in Darfur**

On 8<sup>th</sup> April 2004 in N'djamena, the Chadian capital, a new ceasefire for a period of 45 days was signed between the parties involved in the conflict. Among the main achievements of the deal, which at this time had the participation of the JEM rebel group, was a compromise of humanitarian assistance access facilitation to the conflict victims, the release of prisoners of war and the formation of a ceasefire commission with Chadian and international authorities to control the agreement (Reuters, 2004). The new commission would also have the support of an African Union (AU) mission (UN Human Rights Council, 2007:13). The negotiation process at this stage had the presence of international observers on talks involving humanitarian aspects – the government refused the attendance of Western monitors in political negotiations, even though this was one of the main rebel demands (IRIN: 2004 c). Whilst refusing to accept the insurgency as a political movement, it seems that the government also found that it could avoid any possibility of attending to the rebels' grievances, giving strength to its plans to crush the rebellion by military means.

A few days after the agreement, the government was once again accused by the rebels of having broken the ceasefire, with Janjaweed militia attacks and aerial bombardments (BBC, 2004 a). As Prendergast (2005:5) says, “the April 8<sup>th</sup> ceasefire signed in N'djamena, cautiously hailed as a major breakthrough by negotiators, was a failure from the outset. The ink on the paper was barely dry when the government forces and their proxy Janjaweed militia resumed their attacks against rebel and civilian targets in all three states of Darfur.” By then, one million people had already been displaced in Darfur according to estimates from the UN (BBC 2004 b).

In May, during new negotiations held in a different country – at the Ethiopian capital of Addis Ababa – rebels and government authorities agreed to allow access to Darfur for an international monitor commission, which would be headed by the AU and officially called the African Union Mission in Sudan (AMIS) (Tadesse, 2004). The initial force was composed of 80 military observers. Although the government showed vehement opposition to a stronger troop in the country, the mission grew in size, eventually reaching a total force of around 7000 members (Udombana, 2007:100).

The AU mission in Darfur revealed a high level of disagreement and contradiction regarding its capacity to solve the crisis. Although the UN has praised the AU for having “helped to establish more stability...and having done an admirable job” in Darfur (Sharamo, 2006:51), the mission has also been criticised for inefficiency. The major difficulties have been related to its limited resources and mandate. Bellamy (2005:32) described the mission as “underfunded and understaffed”. As Mensah (2006:4, 10) puts it, one of the major challenges facing the AU is a “lack of appropriate equipment and inadequate or lack of proper interpretation of the mandate by commanders”, and a complete dependence on external donations.

## **2.6 For whom is the “Responsibility to Protect” in Darfur?**

During the Rwanda anniversary speech, the former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan mentioned Darfur, saying that the “international community must be prepared to take swift and appropriate action...which may include military action” (UN Press Document, 2004). Shortly afterwards, the UN Human Rights Commission prepared a report accusing the government and the militia Janjaweed of cases of human rights abuses in the region (Bellamy, 2005:33, 41). It was the beginning of a long process involving the UN and the international community. During this process, on many occasions, Darfur would be compared to Rwanda, in relation to the international community’s failure to act (Bellamy, 2005:33, 41).

Economic and domestic political interests are among the major issues involved in the international community's response to the Darfur crisis. As Howard (2007) says, there are concerns about human rights being directly linked to private interests, especially as regards the US which, in his view, is chiefly concerned about Darfur because Sudan has oil and a “strong link with China, a country the US regards as a strategic rival in the struggle for Africa’s natural resources”. In this aspect, as O’Fahey (2004:28) explores, the US is much more interested in putting an end to the conflict in the south of Sudan, which has been keeping the American oil companies out of the country, due the pressure imposed by the “outrage at the killing of Christians by Muslims.” The fact that China relies on Sudan for 5% to 8% of its oil supply and has been making large investments in order to develop the oil industry in the country,

implies that “any sanctions coming from the UN will have no teeth”. Contributing to this aspect is also the Russian partnership with Sudan (O’Fahey, 2004:28).

As Regan (1998:754, 757) outlines, “intervening in civil conflicts is a risky business”, and countries just do so when they are almost certain of the benefits they will acquire. On the other hand, diplomatic efforts don’t require the same political risk. In dealing with Darfur, it would seem that the risks are too high, and even under strong public pressure, countries are not willing to take them on. Since they cannot play a blind game, they are acting through a diplomatic strategy (Regan,1998:754, 757).

Examples of this diplomatic strategy adopted by the international community are the many consecutive Security Council resolutions that have been passed since 2004, with Resolution 1556 being the first approved in relation to the conflict in Darfur. The resolution gave 30 days for the government to disarm the Janjaweed and punish those responsible for the human rights abuses, threatening economic sanctions. However, no positive responses from the government of Sudan were received (Bellamy, 2005:43).

The process of passing the resolution was an illustration of the contradictions between the members of the Security Council. They couldn’t reach an agreement on how to deal with the Darfur problem, with some countries such as China and Pakistan questioning the sovereignty rights of Sudan, claiming that the resolution was too drastic. And on the other hand, other Western states, even if agreeing that human rights abuses were occurring, showed to be unwilling to assume responsibility and take any kind of action (Bellamy, 2005:43). For Bellamy (2005:43), it was clear that most of them were trying to pass the problem off to other organizations, such as the AU. The same happened on other occasions, such as in the process of approving Resolution 1564 a few months. This new resolution recalled the same basic points of the anterior one, but with a lighter tone. It didn’t impose any sanctions against the Sudanese government, making only a threat of possible future sanctions towards the country’s oil industry in the event that the government didn’t attend to the resolution’s demands, amongst them being the disarmament of the Janjaweed. Although the Resolution passed, again, it had little impact in the field (Bellamy, 2005: 46). Whilst

the international community struggled to reach a consensus in finding effective ways to solve the matter, the crisis continued to escalate.

## **2.7 New Negotiations and a New Year of Conflict**

On the ground, the conflict started to show signs that it was spilling over the border into Chad, which became the location for many of the Darfurian refugee camps. The governments of both countries started mutually accusing each other of arming and supporting rebels from their countries, promoting further destabilisation in the region (Borger, 2007).

In July of 2004 new talks between the government and the rebels took place at Abuja, Nigeria but ended with minimal progress. As Flint & de Waal (2005: 120) describe, meetings in general “were disorganised and slow”. The situation was exacerbated by the lack of experience from the rebel groups, which at this point, were more and more divided.

Two months later the word “genocide” was used by former US Secretary of State Colin Powell to describe the conflict of Darfur. The statement upset the Sudanese government, who retorted that the US declaration was based on American self-political interests. The Sudanese Foreign Minister, Mustafa Osman Ismail, said that the US intention was to use Darfur to disperse the international attention from its war in Iraq (BBC, 2004 c).

Soon after, the government and the rebel groups signed two accords during the conclusion of a new round of negotiations in Abuja. The government accepted a ban on military flights over Darfur and it was once again established that humanitarian access to the conflict region would be facilitated (BBC, 2004 d). As Iyob & Khadiagala (2006:155) state, “despite the celebratory mood in Abuja, the November 9 agreements were, with the exception of the restriction on military flights by Khartoum, simply a reiteration of the previous provisions contained in the original N’Dajamena ceasefire agreement”, from 8 April.

By the end of 2004 a new Security Council resolution was passed - Resolution 1574, which called for an end to the violence. As pointed out by Prunier (2005:122), “this was nice but largely ineffectual. In fact the government of Sudan now felt that as long as it showed ‘good faith’ in Naivasha it could do what it wanted in Darfur.”

The year of 2005 commenced with the signature of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, (CPA) marking the conclusion of the negotiations for the long-standing north-south civil war. Although John Garang from the SPLM southern rebel group said that the achievement would also eventually be beneficial to Darfur, the rebels from the region were not as optimistic. At that time, Colonel Omar Adam from the JEM said that “the government is preparing for war”, claiming that extra arms were being transferred by the government to Darfur (BBC, 2005 a).

In February, the International Commission of Inquiry on Darfur (2005) published a report on the results of its investigations conducted in the area. It confirmed the abuse of human rights with the occurrence of crimes against the humanity, of which all parties involved in the civil war were accused. The report also showed strong evidence of the close relations between the government and the militia Janjaweed. However, the Commission didn’t confirm the allegations of genocide. It concluded by stating that all parties responsible for crimes of war in Darfur should be prosecuted by the International Criminal Court (ICC) in The Hague.

The Sudanese government denied the accusations contained in the report, classifying the material as unfair and not approving the decision regarding the ICC. The government insisted that suspects should be sent to the courts in Sudan instead. On the international scene, the US, in the fear that eventually its own nationals accused of war crimes may be sent to The Hague tribunal, opposed the use of the ICC, suggesting that those involved in crimes of war in Darfur should be sent to a special court specifically opened for the case (BBC, 2005 b). However in March 2005, with a US abstention, the UN Security Council managed to pass a referral allowing the ICC to investigate a list of 51 names of people in Sudan and Darfur that had been accused of involvement in human rights abuse by the International Commission of Inquiry on Darfur (Bellamy, 2005:49).

Meanwhile, the National Movement for Reform and Development (NMRD), another rebel group that had been formed from the split of the JEM back in 2004, broke its deal with the government. The NMRD, which had signed separate agreements with the government establishing a ceasefire between the parties, accused Khartoum of continuing its attacks in Darfur. The NMRD is mostly based along the Chadian border and is said to have strong links with the Chad government. The rebel group denies such relations and support from Sudan's neighbouring country (Reuters, 2005).

New negotiation talks between the government and the other two rebel groups, the JEM and SLM/A were delayed. The rebels demanded that they would only go back to the negotiation tables after those suspected of committing crimes of war in Darfur were sent to trial. The UN criticised the rebels' attitude, saying that what they were asking was unrealistic and that it was postponing a solution to the conflict (Sudan Tribune, 2005). Further rounds of talks were held in Nigeria with no apparent progress, with splits amongst the rebel groups showing to be a "major impediment to the negotiations", as Iyob & Khadiagala (2006:157, 158) describe. At this point, the international community's support for the rebels' cause started to diminish.

## **2.8 The DPA Agreement**

The beginning of 2006 was marked by discussions related to the possibility of a UN Peacekeeper mission taking over from the AU mission in Darfur. The plans to replace the AU forces with UN troops were fiercely opposed by the Sudanese government, with the president al-Bashir affirming that "any foreign intervention in Sudan and Darfur will be a graveyard for any foreign troops venturing to enter" (Sudan Tribune, 2006 b). In Khartoum, protests against the deployment of western foreign forces in Darfur saw thousands take to the streets. Meanwhile, it was decided that the AU would stay in the Darfur conflict area for an extra six months, and the UN said it would only send its troops to the region with the government's consent (BBC, 2006 a). Months later, the AU had to once more extend its mandate in Darfur and its forces are to date still in the region (BBC 2006 b).

Peace talks in March and April were threatened by the escalating violence in Darfur. However, negotiations progressed over the discussion of an AU-backed proposal,



which was agreed to by the government but was being refused by the rebels under the allegation that it didn't cover the "areas of security, power sharing, and wealth sharing" (Iyob & Khadiagala, 2006:159). The rebels also wanted a vice-president from Darfur in the Sudanese government, as it had been agreed for the southern region of the country. Yet, under the pressure of the international community, on May 5<sup>th</sup>, at the seventh round of negotiations, the SLM/MM - one faction of the original SLM/A rebel group that had split - agreed to sign the Darfur Peace Agreement (DPA). The other SLM/A faction and the JEM rebel declined the accord (Iyob & Khadiagala, 2006:159).

Despite the signing of the DPA, the conflict in Darfur never receded. On the contrary, as the UN Human Rights Council (2007:14) says, "since the signing of the DPA, the security situation in the region has deteriorated. Non-signatory rebel factions have splintered...violation of human rights and international humanitarian law have increased by all parties in the conflict." As Prunier (2007:1) criticises, "the conditions of the agreement were disastrous." He describes as "ridiculous" the terms of the accord that stipulated a reparation of about \$12 per person for the victims of the war and maintained "a regional assembly entirely controlled and manipulated by the Islamists". A further criticism is that the DPA failed to address issues linked to the roots of the conflict, such as land rights and the reunification of the Darfur region, which in 1994 has been divided in three provinces "for better control by Khartoum". The fact that only one rebel group had signed the DPA was also seen as one of central constraints for peace in the region.

## **2.9 The UN Peacekeeping Force heads to Darfur**

In August of 2007, 16 faction leaders of the many rebel groups presently in Darfur held a meeting in Tanzania to try and reach a common agreement for future peace talks with the government. Although a deal between them was apparently concluded, as Prunier (2007:1) describes, "the Sudanese government stated categorically that the whole point of the meeting was simply to get to non-signatories to adhere to the agreement and that the agreement would, under no circumstances, be renegotiated." By "agreement", Prunier refers to the DPA. As Prunier (2007:1) says, in the meeting in Tanzania, as well as in the many others that happened since 2003, "Khartoum's

tactics appear to have been to try and divide its enemies and get them to sign anything at all.”

Also in August 2007, the UN Security Council, after a strong campaign to persuade the Sudanese government, managed to approve the employment of a UN-AU joint peacekeeping force in Darfur. The UN resolution established that the force will be formed by troops and police of up to 26,000 members. The force’s mandate allows the use of force to defend civilians and aid workers (BBC 2007, b). However, as Solomon (2007:1) notes, “any peacekeeping force, no matter how robust its mandate, can only contain violence (negative peace). It cannot promote real peace or positive peace, which entails removing the structural roots of the violence.”

As illustrated in this chapter, the account of the Darfur conflict involves many contradictory interests from all the parties involved in the region’s crisis, namely the government, rebels, and the international community. Up to now, none of the multiple UN Security Council resolutions or countless negotiation talks between the government, rebels and international observers have managed to find a route to peace in Darfur, and the violence in the region is still flaring.

By playing its political and economic cards, the government has managed to avoid any major changes to the central power concentration or government policies, which have been among the rebels’ chief grievances. It appears that in keeping to a strategy of denial of the insurgency movement and its political motivations, and as portraying the conflict as a ‘tribal war’, the government has bought time to put into practice its military strategy. A plan that, as will be demonstrated in the remainder of this thesis, seems to have contributed to exacerbating the societal divisions in Darfur and also aided in splitting the rebels and, thus, weakening their capacity for negotiation.

In the next chapter of this thesis, this study will analyse one of the “roots of violence” that seems central in understanding the current situation in Darfur, which will also assist in demonstrating this study’s argument - that the conflict in the region goes beyond its ‘ethnic hatred’ explanations. Chapter 3 will investigate the effects on the Darfur society of the desertification process in the region, with the occurrence of multiple droughts – especially the severe droughts of the 1980s. Along with this

discussion, other issues will be explored, such as identity formation in Darfur, land regulations, and the history of economic marginalisation in the region.

## **Chapter 3: Heating Up - The Role of the Environment in the Darfur Conflict**

In Darfur, land is life. The success or struggle of the people's existence in the region is directly related to the productivity of the land they occupy. The issue of land is a strong determinant of how the people identify themselves, their choice of livelihood, residence address and their alternative between war and peace. As Flint & de Waal (2005:2) note, "in the dry sandy areas of eastern Darfur, especially, villages grow and die along their water supplies and the fertility of their soils". This chapter will examine these environmental factors in the context of the conflict. As will be illustrated, the Darfurian society seems to have been directly affected by environmental factors, such as multiple droughts. These factors and related issues appear to have contributed to dividing the people in the region, creating the conditions that would subsequently be used politically, in order to manipulate the present conflict in the region along ethnic lines.

Agriculture is the main economic activity in Sudan. Eighty percent of the country's population are engaged in agriculture, and have to subsist in an environment where arable land is scarce due to the ecological characteristics of the country, which include low water availability and large areas of improper soil for this type of activity (World Bank, 2003). Only 6.8 percent of the country's land is arable (CIA, 2007). In Sudan, the desert occupies over 45.3 percent of the country's area – 1,123,000 km<sup>2</sup> (Ahmed & Shazalli, 1999: 15). The importance of the agricultural sector in Sudan leads to an interdependence between the society of the country as a whole and the environment. An aspect that is also observable in many parts of the African continent (Suliman, 1992:5). As Suliman (1992:5) points out, "human and animal life depend on a delicate balance of the soil, water and flora that support it, and disruption of any of these vital elements creates havoc."

In Darfur, this dependence on the environment makes survival in the region a complex task. As Flint & de Waal (2005:2) explain, "extracting a living from this land requires unrelenting hard work and detailed knowledge of every crevice from which food or livelihood can be scratched." This picture is becoming bleaker over time. The Darfur region has been one of the most affected areas in Sudan by the advent of droughts and a process of desertification that has struck the country (Bilsborrow & DeLargy, 1990). The significance of this environmental disturbance that brought famine and exposure to the region is a key factor in the history of Darfur, which

cannot be accurately told without a deeper understanding of this ecological process. As De Waal (2005:59 a) says, “many famines are remembered in Darfur. They form part of the historical narrative, playing a role in the fall of governments, the migration of people, and religious uprisings.”

From the multiple periods of drought in Darfur, the years of 1984/85 are the ones that have had the worst effects on the region (Suliman, 1993). As De Waal (2005:112 a) describes, during this time, “Darfur saw hunger and destitution”. Furthermore, the drought brought not only famine, but also a further increase in competition for resources, which was already rising since the 1970s. This struggle for scarce resources generated by the droughts and desertification is said to have a direct link to the actual conflict that is affecting the region in recent years. A report from the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP, 2007:58) stated that there is a “strong indication that the hardship caused to pastoralist societies by desertification is one of the underlying causes of the current war in Darfur.” However, it is important to note that at the same time, the report acknowledged that other factors such as “political, religious, ethnic, tribal and clan divisions, economic factors, land tenure deficiencies and historical feuds” also play their part in the conflict (UNEP, 2007:77). As the report put it (UNEP, 2007:77), environmental issues “are generally contributing factors only, not the sole cause for tension.”

The concept of environmental factors as a cause of conflict dates back two hundred years ago to Reverend Thomas Malthus, and this train of thought has grown in popularity since the end of the Cold War, showing a tendency for the inclusion of “non-traditional security issues” in the debate around world politics (Kahl, 2002:1). However, as Kahl (2002:1) points out, while neo-Malthusians scholars of thought, among them Homer-Dixon, defend that matters such as population growth and resources scarcity can help to breed crises in poorer countries, neo-classical economists maintain a more optimistic position, arguing that the society's capacity for adaptation can overcome these issues. One of Kahl's criticisms towards the neo-Malthusian school of thought is that in general it fails to identify which factors are more important in generating a situation of war.

According to Homer-Dixon (1999:12), there are strong indications that scarcity of resources such as cropland, fresh water and forests can lead to violence, especially in places with a high dependence on subsistent agricultural activities. A case that seems to fit Darfur. Homer-Dixon (1999:13, 48) suggests that there are three main causes of environment scarcity, which can interact with each other: resource depletion and degradation, population growth and unequal distribution of resources. These causes are respectively identified as “supply-induced, demand-induced, and structural scarcities”. All of these, and in particular the two first causes, seem to some extent applicable to Darfur. In addition, the author (Homer-Dixon,1999:12) admits that the scarcity of natural resources alone is unlikely to generate war, but it assists in creating a scenario of “social stresses within countries, helping to stimulate subnational insurgencies, ethnic clashes and urban unrest.”

The lack of data to prove the link between environmental factors and conflict is another major pitfall of this theory. As Goldstone (2002:4) says, there is “little support” to base, for example, Homer-Dixon's claim that environmental change will increase the incidence of wars. In places where environmental issues seem present, in general, they are not the main trigger of conflicts. As an illustration, Goldstone cites South Africa and Kenya, where conflicts for the control of land were more related to the elite political power struggle than resources competition. To substantiate his view, Goldstone quotes Günther Barchlers, whose analysis on the subject indicated that “the threshold of violence definitely depends on *socio-political* factors and not on the degree of environmental degradation as such.” Furthermore, Goldstone (2002:14) notes that the migration of one ethnic group into the areas of other groups, putting at risk the control of the area by the native group, might create a situation prone to conflicts. Importantly, this last point, with which Homer-Dixon (1999) concurs, appears to be central in the case of Darfur. Environmental issues have altered the traditional patterns of migration in the region, and this migration seems to have been a primary contributor in the development of resources competition and violent disputes.

Although the UNEP report highlights the link between competition over resources and the actual conflict in Darfur, it is indeed not possible to ignore the role that governments have played in generating the situation in which the area currently finds itself. As the International Crisis Group (2004:4 b) states, the conflict in Darfur “is

the culmination of two decades of misguided policies by successive central governments.”

Keeping this aspect in mind, this study will throughout this chapter examine environmental and related non-environmental issues in Darfur and their impact on the society's way of life in the region. As one of the two main focuses presented in the argument of this study, the examination of this environmental factor aims to show that the conflict in Darfur is not a war based purely on feelings of “ethnic hatred”, but the result of the interplay between a collection of events that moulded the conflict in the region into its present characteristics. There is little doubt that ethnicity also played its role in the Darfur conflict, but it seems that this role was much more as a weapon of war than as a single root of the conflict. A point which follows Muller's (2000:10) argument that, on occasion, ethnicity seems to represent more the mode on which people are driven into violence than the source of the latter.

Due to the correlation between external factors and environmental issues in Darfur, subjects such as some of the government's regulations and their implications for the region will also be investigated in this chapter. An example is the policies of marginalisation of Darfur, which are reflected by the lack of development of the region. While at first these matters may seem separate issues that may be beyond the scope of this study, in Darfur's reality there appears to be a strong connection between these factors. It is not only the droughts and resources scarcity that make life in Darfur a daily battle, but also, the shortage of methods available to the society in dealing with this – having no access to technology, equipment and infrastructure in general, which could be employed to minimise the effects of environmental issues. As Flint & Waal (2005:2) note, “a hand-dug well in a dry river bed can be the difference between life and death for a camel herd trekking from the valleys of central Darfur to the desert-edge pastures.”

In this sense, it seems that the “optimists” who oppose the conflict theory linked to the environment, have reason in saying that with available technology and development, the society can have the capacity to overcome matters such as resources scarcity, thus, the issue is not directly environmental, but social, economic and political (Kahl, 2002:5). Homer-Dixon (1999:181) also seems to agree in part with this aspect, when



he points out that it is the poorer communities in general that feel more the effects of environmental problems, since for them, “the prerequisites for effective adaptation to scarcity often do not exist.” However, as Homer-Dixon (1999:181) notes, this does not mean that “environmental scarcity is always an unimportant cause” and thus shouldn’t be addressed in conflict resolutions. In fact, in the case of Darfur, this seems to be a key subject. For Solomon (2007:1), one of the major requirements for peace in the region is the realisation of those involved in the peace initiatives of the “connection between the emergence of virulent ethnic identities and environment degradation.” It is in order to clarify this connection that this study will proceed to examine some of the land characteristics in the region and its links to the Darfurian society.

### **3.1 The Land in Darfur**

Darfur is a region of numerous tribes and, as diverse as its population, are the characteristics of the land. An environmental diversity that reflects how the Darfurians divide themselves, co-exist, and seek for a way to survive. O’Fahey (1980:1) notes that “fundamental to the human geography of Darfur are the great distances between concentrations of fertile land and people, the difficulties of movement, the harshness and precariousness of the environment and the fluctuations in rainfall.”

Lying in the western part of Sudan, the Darfur region borders with three African countries – Libya, Chad and the Central African Republic. The northern region of Darfur features a Saharan setting, where water is limited and sand constitutes most of the soil – commonly known as goz (De Waal, 2005:35 a). In the north, this sandy soil occupies around 65 percent of the region, while in the south, it makes up 10 to 15 percent of the area (Fadul, 2006: 34).

Fadul (2006:34) defines the ecological nature of Darfur as having four climatic zones. The desert zone is in the extreme north where rainfall is minimal. It is followed below by the arid zone, which also has restricted rainfall – around 100 to 300 mm per year, and is located along the middle of the northern region. In the middle of Darfur is the “poor savannah”, with a rainy season that lasts from 3 to 4 months and brings about

200 to 400 mm of rain to the area. In the south is what Fadul (2006:34) calls the “rich savanna” – it enjoys a longer period of precipitation that continues for approximately 4 to 5 months depending on the year and has a rainfall of 400 to 800 mm per year.

The extinct volcano of Jebel Marra, with its peak soaring to 8,000 feet, stands in the centre of Darfur. It is a region with fertile soil, suited to agricultural activity (Collins, 2005:2). At these elevated altitudes, the terrain benefits from higher amounts of rain. The rich soil of the volcano and the year-round availability of water turn it into one of the most desirable homelands in Darfur. A desire that intensifies in times of drought, when natural resources become scarce and a dry image becomes the picture of most parts of Darfur (Mohammed, 2004:5).

According to information from the Sudanese Department of Statistics, in five decades, during the period between 1956 and 2003, the population in Darfur increased from 1,080,000 to 6,480,000 (Fadul, 2006: 35). It is important to note, as Fadul (2006:35) points out, that in terms of statistics from Sudan, there is a lack of available data. It was in 1993 that the last official census was made, and much of its data is not considered precise any more (Young & Osman & Aklilu & Dale, 2005). It seems relevant to add that government information should be considered with scepticism.

Eighty-six percent of the Darfurians are estimated to live in rural areas (Mohamed & Badri, 2004). Their dispersement throughout Darfur is directly linked to the diverse environmental conditions found in the different parts of the region. The choice of homeland depends on which ecological zone is more suited to each group's economic activity. Cultivators mainly occupy the central area of Darfur, where the soil is richer and water more abundant. Alternatively, the characteristics of the north and the south chiefly attract the people involved in pastoralist activities (Haaland, 1972). Sedentary farmers make up around 75 percent of the rural population in Darfur, while the other 15 percent are the so-called pastoral nomads (Mohamed & Badri, 2004).

The split by activity in Darfur is also generally related to the classification of different ethnic groups and their geographical location in the region. The peasants are commonly associated with the “African tribes” or “non-Arab tribes” – the Fur, the Masalit, the Daju, the Senyar and Tama, amongst others. As previously iterated, these

groups tend to concentrate in the central region of Darfur. The so-called “Baggara Arabs”, which consist of multiple “Arab tribes”, such as the Ta’āisha, Beni Helba, Habbāniya, Reizegat and Beni, are dedicated to pastoral economic activity, occupying the northern and southern Darfur regions. The “African” Zaghawa is seen as an exception to the rule since, akin to the “Arabs”, this tribe is also mainly identified as pastoralists (Haaland, 1972). However, this categorisation of the Zaghawa as nomads can be contradictory, since they are also engaged in agriculturalist activities (De Waal, 2004). As Haaland (1972: 151) concludes, “ethnic groups are thus identified with one of the traditional subsistence patterns, and ideologically one also finds that each emphasises its own characteristic pattern and associated style of life.”

### **3.2 The Identity Formation Process**

Although a distinction between farmers and pastoralists, or even between “Arabs” or “non-Arab-Africans” may seem useful in understanding the complex ethnic configuration in Darfur, in reality, the categorisation on the ground is far more unclear. As O’Fahey (2004: 24) says “no part of Darfur was ever ethnically homogenous”.

Taken literally, Darfur means the ‘Land of the Fur’, with the Fur being the largest tribe in Darfur. However, De Waal (2005: 181 a) explains that “the ‘Fur’ was historically an ethno-political term, but nonetheless at any historical point, has referred only to a minority of the region’s population, which includes many ethnicities and tribes.” This author adds that the actual categorisation of “Arabs” and “Africans” is a recent concept in the area that has been ideologically constructed. De Waal (2005: xiv a) points out that during his researches in Darfur for his book “Famine that Kills” first published in 1989, he never used the terms ‘Africans’, ‘black’ or ‘indigenous’, since “the terminology and the concepts that underlie these words were simply not in use.” Identities at the time were not immutable. Although doses of racism could be felt in discussions between “Arabs” and “Africans” over land issues, it was not uncommon for people from one group to move to another group from time to time. As an example, De Waal (2005 a) cites the case of the Gimir people, who in the last two decades have been assimilating Arab characteristics, becoming more identified with this group than with their original assemblage.

As Deng (1995) observes, in the Northern area of Sudan, non-Arab communities have been 'Arabised' through a process implemented by successive governments. Agreeing to adopt Islam as their religion and Arabic as their language, these tribes have been "virtually adopted by the dominant Arab groups as 'orphans' of Arabism, redeemed from the degraded status of their slave origin as blacks" (Deng, 1995:4). Deng (1995) explains that this process of Arabisation was also linked to a system where Arabs and Muslims are positioned on the top of the pyramid of power, as a race superior to the black Africans. For those that were viewed as historical "slaves", the chance of adopting Islam and "becoming" an Arab was an opportunity of a lifetime, a possibility to be graded to a higher level of the social order. Nevertheless, despite the acceptance and assumption of an Arab culture and race, the blacks were never fully received into this society. "The darker the colour of the skin, the less authentic the claim to Arab ancestry and the greater likelihood of being looked down on as slave origin" (Deng, 1995:5).

Further to this issue of classification as "Arab" or "African", Flint & de Waal (2005: 4) explain that not so long ago, the choice of belonging to one or another assemblage would depend more upon an individual or group's present situation. The authors use as an example the village of Dor, which used to accommodate four different tribes, the Zaghawa, the Fur, the Tunjur and the Kaitinga. In this village, it was apparent that the notion of ancestry could be relevant in cases of political support or marriage, even though intermarriage between the tribes was a common practice. And in situations such as the marketplace, although everyone generally spoke Arabic, merchants would try to learn as many dialects as they could in order to switch from one to another, depending on the client. In addition, depending on their momentary economic activity, a Fur or a Tunjur wouldn't mind "changing" their identity, and start to identify themselves as "Arabs".

For O' Fahey (1980:3), in Darfur, the genealogy of Arabs or non-Arabs fails to clarify the ethnography of the region. In this sense, more valuable is the use of a cultural and occupational approach in defining ethnicity in Darfur. Indeed, due to years of intermarriage amongst the many tribes in Darfur, there is a high genealogic mix in the region and in general there are no pure races as such, though some Arab tribes are still

attempting to claim origins in this way (Suliman, 1997). In terms of skin colour, “Arabs” or “Africans” in Darfur are black. However, as Prunier (2005:4) observes, “the various forms of Sudanese cultural racism distinguish “Zurug” from “Arab”, even if the skin has the same colour”.

In occupational terms, there is also no straightforward ethnic classification in Darfur. The most common distinction of “Arabs” as the nomads and “Africans” as the farmers is also blurred. Many of the people in Darfur exercise both economic activities. It is common for a farmer to keep animals and for a nomad to cultivate a small piece of land (De Waal, 2005: 52 a). In addition, people from Darfurian tribes may skip from one economic activity to another and, in doing so, change tribes. Identity correlation, as a result, is more dependent on economic circumstances than cultural links, as previously mentioned. This aspect corresponds to Barth's (1994: 12) argument that “processes of boundary maintenance quickly showed interactional, historical, economic and political circumstances: they are highly situational, not primordial.”

These fluid boundaries were noticed by Haaland (1972) during the 60s while he was doing his field research in Darfur. Haaland tells of the case of a girl that was originally from a Fur tribe, lived part of her life with her father among the Salamat Baggara Arab group, and later got married to a Fur man, settling down in a Fur village. Meanwhile, her brother, continued to live with the Arab tribe. Another case that Haaland (1972) uses to exemplify how people in Darfur are used to switching identities is that of the Fur Mahmud Yumma, who spent most of his life as a nomad whilst living with his father. After his father's death he received some animals, although he didn't manage to succeed as a pastoralist and ended up opting for a sedentary way of life. On the other hand, his brother persisted as a nomad and continued living among the Baggara Arab tribes, where he eventually couldn't even remember how to speak the Fur language.

As Haaland (1972:162) sums up, using the example of the “African” Fur and the “Arab” Baggara, “the style of life associated with cultivation is categorised as Fur, the pastoral way of life as Baggara. By practising nomadism, persons perform an activity that identifies them as Baggara. A Fur is thus categorised by others as a Baggara the day he leaves the village and migrates with his cattle.” This association

also involves the assimilation of the other group's culture. The same pattern of identity changes was apparent in other tribes, such as the Tama (Haaland, 1972).

Similar observations were made by O'Fahey (2004:24), who did his research in the Darfur region during the 70s. The scholar says that it was normal at the time for prosperous Fur farmers to keep cattle and "to cross the ethnic frontier and become Baggara" if this would mean more profits. As a result, "in a few generations his descendants would have an 'authentically' Arab genealogy." In this sense it seems possible to conclude that identities in Darfur were not absolutely defined on primordial feelings and the belief of belonging to a race or not, but that the recognition of identities was more the outcome of a constructive process, based on rational choices. The case point of Darfur doesn't appear to be unique. In a general context, as Castells (2004:7) argues, it is not hard to recognise that identities are the result of a constructivist process, however, the major challenge is to find out "how, from what, by whom, and for what" these identity notions were created. Questions that also seem essential in comprehending the present ethnic divisions in Darfur.

Following on from the idea that identities are the result of a constructivist process, Eriksen (2002) describes that the concept of ethnicity is relational, and not a property of a group. Ethnicity formation is related to how groups view themselves as different and unique, and consequently, how they are viewed by others. This perception of identity has a direct influence on the relation between those groups. Whilst it can be said that differences exist more due to the belief of people in these differences, ethnicity is not imaginary and has real consequences on how groups see themselves and others.

As Du Toit (2006:114) explains, "Darfur tribes are a prime example of cross-cutting ethnic difference with mild cultural and racial differences relativised by a shared faith". In this case, the Muslim religion. The actual present concept of identification of Darfurians as "Arabs" or "Africans" was the culmination of a sequence of factors, of political, economic and ecological nature, which as a result, ended up pitting "one community against the other" (Du Toit, 2006:114). In relation to the actual doses of racism present on the ground in the attacks observed along the conflict in Darfur, O'Fahey (2004:25) concludes: "I do not profess to understand what is transpiring on the

ground in Darfur, but that something different from before is happening, of that I have little doubt.”

Having made it clear that ethnic classifications in Darfur are of an ambiguous nature and that in a not too distant past they have been highly mutable, this study will continue with the classification of Darfurians amongst “Arabs” and “Africans”, or “farmers” and “nomads”. This option of categorisation is not only in order to make it simpler for the reader to understand the complex circumstances in Darfur, but more because that, indeed, this division system of identities seems to have developed in the region over time, and can also be seen as a consequence of the present conflict. As recounted in the first chapter of this study, rebel groups are being identified as the marginalised “Africans”, while the militia Janjaweed is known to be formed of “Arab” groups. In this sense, the present ethnicity definitions in Darfur became the “product of violent conflict”, as described by Suliman (1997:3).

It seems possible to deduce that multiple factors have had an influence on this prospect of identity construction in Darfur. Amongst them, as observed in one of the main arguments of this study, is the ethnicity manipulation by the government in its counterinsurgency movement to suppress the rebel forces in the region. This point ties in with Brown's (2001:19) approach that the “ethnic card” is perceived as a useful technique exploited by governments needing to keep power and legitimise their rules, in the case of lost of ideological support, and will be further examined in the following chapter. For now, this study will return to the main focus of this chapter – the ecological calamities that have been occurring in Darfur and their implication for the social order of the region. In order to understand how the periods of drought and the desertification process also affected the previous system of ethnic identification in Darfur, in the next section, this study will go back to the region’s distant past, when ethnicity used to “function as a matrix for cooperation, not confrontation” between the Darfurians (Suliman, 1997:9).

### **3.3 Farmers and Nomads – A Time of Cooperation in Darfur**

When following the Darfur conflict in the media, it is hard to picture that these same people that now feature in stories of killings and indiscriminate crimes such as rape,

used to live in a relatively tranquil co-existence. Not that disputes between the multiple tribes in the region never used to occur. Indeed, in a way, it seems that conflicts have always been present amongst the Darfurian community. However, it is possible to note a change in the pattern of how these quarrels continued to develop in more recent years. As Abdul-Jalil (2004:17) notes, “disputes from the 1950s to the 1970s, which were of low intensity, sporadic ‘tribal’ raids and skirmishes, have transformed since the mid-1980s into high intensity, persistent and large-scale armed conflicts.” In addition, as observed in an International Crisis Group report (2004: 5 b) by Yousef Takana, a Darfurian scholar, prior to these times of full-blown violence, the tribes’ relation of co-existence was illustrated by the fact that groups didn’t used to get involved in disputes of other closely related tribes, in an ethnic association that seems to characterize the Darfur of today. Conflicts at the time were more localised. They would occur between “Arab” and “African” tribes, but also within those groups, meaning “Arabs” versus “Arabs” and “Africans” versus “Africans”.

In order to understand the correlation between the different ethnic groups in Darfur, it is essential to comprehend how the two main activities practiced by the rural people in the region – pastoral and sedentary farming - are related to each other in what Fadul (2006:40) calls a “complementary relationship”. As Fadul (2006:40) explains, “animal manure improves land fertility and animals benefit from crop residue as good fodder of high nutritional value”. In relation to this division of livelihood in Darfur, it is interesting to note Horowitz' (1995: 113) argument that “in ethnic conflicts, the ethnic division of labor is more a shield than a sword.” For the author, the fact that different groups practice diverse activities, contribute to minimising the competition within these. In this sense, the author maintains that in most cases, ethnic conflicts are not about economic rivalries, although those might exist. This point made by Horowitz seems to illustrate some aspects of the past societal order in Darfur since, as will be further illustrated in this chapter, nomads and agriculturalists in general had a relation of interdependence.

If following this line of thought, the environmental factor in Darfur appears to be of even greater importance in understanding how the societal order in the region crumbled from a relationship of harmony to one of conflict. It seems that the environmental factor can help in elucidating how the point made by Horowitz, which



applied in the Darfur of old, seems to have been altered. The explanation from Haaland (1872:162) is that, if confronted by the scarcity of natural resources, the two agricultural activities performed by the groups in Darfur, which usually complement each other, can face competition. Since they depend on the exploitation of communal resources, the relationship between the people that practice one or the other activity can fluctuate according to the pressure on the land (Haaland, 1972:162).

Both these activities are highly dependent on an ecological balance, as previously mentioned. Although they have a “complementary relationship”, these activities are diverse in nature, and the tribe’s choice for one or the other also means the option for different styles of life.

Tribes dedicated to land cultivation live out of subsistence farming and have a more sedentary method of life (UNEP, 2007). In an ideal situation, farmers produce enough for their subsistence and do not have to work for others. For sedentary peasants, wage labour is seen as a shameful activity (De Waal, 2005 a). Alternatively, tribes that live from pastoralist activities in general have the necessity for regular movement in order to search for pasture, in a constant adaptation to the climate of the different seasons of the year, and thus have a higher interaction with the users of other lands. Their economic activity requires larger open spaces in order to migrate from one area to another, and stable access to water on these migration routes is of vital value (Markakis, 1993:1). Not only is the nomad’s activity highly vulnerable to ecological conditions, but also to the maintenance of their culture, since the health of their animals is a main point of their existence. As a popular song amongst the Zaghawa tribe goes, “without any animals, you won’t find a girl to marry” (Tubiana & Tubiana, 1977:81).

The mode of migration of the Zaghawa tribes was investigated by Tubiana & Tubiana (1977:4) during the 1950s. They describe how imperative the seasonal movement was for the survival of the Zaghawa, which, in a way, is a response to variable ecological factors. The groups from this tribe, whose natural habitat is the northern areas of Darfur, would move south during the seasons of low rainfall. In the southern region of Darfur, they would receive shelter from the sedentary farmers, and in some instances,

work with them. Later, when the times of rain arrived in the north, they would return to their homeland.

As observed, these migration movements were determined according to the rainy periods, which were “impatiently awaited” (Tubiana & Tubiana, 1977:33). During the course of their annual journeys, the Zaghawa dug wells in order to obtain water. By common accord, these wells belonged to the group that dug them, but on occasions, the wells could be shared between different tribes. As noted at the time by Tubiana & Tubiana (1977:45), “in practice few clashes occur when there is enough water and the animals are in a healthy condition, even if someone outside the group comes to draw water, provided he behaves according to the established custom, by bringing his own dipper, waiting for his turn, and so on. But should water become scarce or a man try to water sick animals, daggers are then drawn to settle the matter.”

To avoid clashes between farmers and nomads, animal routes were established throughout Darfur by communal arrangements. Nomads could use these routes during their migration from north to south or vice versa, depending on the season. These routes, which were eleven in total during the 1950s, could vary in length, stretching from 250km to more than 600km. Located between farms, the routes utilised as passages the free disposable lands, which were also used as grazing areas by the nomads. In the case of the pastoralists’ animals overstepping the boundaries of the routes and invading farmers’ areas and damaging crops, the owner of the animals would normally have to pay a compensation for the farmer. In some instances, the faults could also be forgiven (Fadul, 2006,40).

During this migration journey, it was normal for nomads to count on the help of the farmers. It was a common practice for the nomads to be allowed to sell their merchandise at the sedentary farmers’ markets. Conversely, farmers would also benefit from the nomads’ visits due the possibility of selling grains and buying animals, the supply of which was completely dependent on the nomads (Barth, 1967). “We would cultivate millet and share markets, schools and clinics with the Fur village”, reminisces Umbasal Adam Bashir, a nomad from Darfur. With the subsequent conflict in the region, he says that life became harder for everyone. “We are afraid of this tough life. We are moving all the time and there is no education for

us or our children”. The sedentary farmers’ villages where the nomads would normally find medical help and have access to the markets on which they rely for food, don’t exist anymore. They have been destroyed during the years of war (IRIN, 2005: 3 a).

Innumerable accounts from the 1960s and 1970s indicate a relation of exchange between nomads and sedentary farmers in Darfur, where all the parties used to benefit. At any given time, one village could have people from “African” tribes such as the Seinga, Berti, Jawamaa and Masalit, and from “Arab” groups like the Jallaba and Reizegat. Sheikh Hilal Mohamed Abdalla, the father of Musa Hillal, the alleged Janjaweed militia coordinator, tells how the “African” farmers would receive “Arab” nomads as guests. Sheikh Hilal tells how he used to arrive in the Fur area and be welcomed with a banquet. At the time of leaving, the Sheikh would present his host with two camels (Flint & de Waal, 2005).

The “Arab” Reizegat, which is a tribe located in the southern area of Darfur and is one of the main tribes involved in the Janjaweed militia, are known for having had good relations with their “African” neighbours until the end of the 60s. As Mohammed (2004:1) says, “they had even been hailed for demonstrating a relationship of cooperation and mutual benefit with all the settled farmers in whose territories camel nomads looked for pasture and water.” Mohammed (2004:2) explains that there are strong indications that this tribal involvement in conflict is “rather a recent development.”

In areas such as Jebel Marra, once the time for harvest had come to an end, nomads would come to the region and live amongst the Fur community for months, normally leaving at the beginning of the first rains, which start in April or May (Suliman, 1997). It also wasn’t uncommon for nomads to take care of the livestock of sedentary farmers. The rainy season can present a problem for the sedentary farmers with an investment in animals, which is common practice in Darfur. As a means of solving this problem, the Fur, for instance, instead of migrating with the cattle themselves, would often entrust their animals to the “Arab” Baggara, who would move with the animals to the better areas during this season. In exchange, for example, the nomads would get milk (Haaland, 1972).

In order to control their livestock, sedentary farmers also would forge alliances with the nomads for arrangements in terms of security. In Darfur, as noted by Haaland (1972:161), “the maintenance of a herd does not only depend on the access to grazing areas, but also on the ability to protect it from thieves and raiders. The less an area is under control of the government’s administration, the greater the need for the herd-owners to mobilise local support for the protection of their livestock.” Many of these alliances involved inter-tribal marriages as a form of establishing relationships amongst people of different groups. Again, here, it is possible to observe how the question of identity was closely related to economic motivation. As an example, “for a Fur herd-owner, the economic costs of marrying a Zaghawa girl can be seen as an investment because the political support he thereby gets gives the opportunity for a faster growth of the cattle capital”, illustrates Haaland (1972:162).

As all of these accounts associated with the relationship between neighbours of different Darfur tribes demonstrate that not too long ago, ethnic background was not a primary issue in the region. This concept can be observed in how the people would move from one tribe to another, thus changing identity, and through the past relationship of interaction between nomads and farmers, despite their contrasting ways of life. However, as noted by Haaland (1972: 161), and as was already the case in Darfur in the 1970s, “where pressure on resources increases this may lead to a systematic selection of units with reference to ethnic background.”

This effect of environment scarcity on the tribes in Darfur was also observed by Holy (1974) during field research carried out in the 1960s among the Berti tribe. According to Holy, even at that time this tribe would frequently suffer divisions. Due to population growth and drought periods, fertile land could become scarce, generating disputes within the tribe. This would often result in the split of the group into smaller units. This localized example from Holy seems to be of general dimension in Darfur. It appears that with the increase in the periods of drought in the region, there was a parallel diminishment in the tribal relationships.

### 3.4 Heating Up

Darfur has been affected by droughts since earlier times. The UNEP (2007) report - "Sudan Post-Conflict Environment Assessment" lists the incidence of seven droughts from 1967 to 2000 in the country. In general, Darfur has been one of the regions in Sudan that suffered the heaviest impacts during these periods of droughts, which according to the report had a "dominant effect on agriculture and food security, and are strongly linked to displacement and related conflicts" (UNEP, 2007:59).

In an article from 1922, Sarsfield-Hall paints a gloomy picture of Darfur in relation to the lack of water in the region: "the greater part of northern Darfur appears to be gradually drying up, and there is little doubt that it was at one time much more densely populated than it is at the present, but that its former inhabitants were forced to evacuate it in large numbers owing to a diminution in the annual rainfall and a consequent lack of water" (Sarsfield-Hall: 1922: 362). The author continues his account stating that villages had been abandoned and where water was once found in abundance and gardens would be covered with palm trees, there was nothing left.

Older generations in Darfur also tell of a time when palm trees covered some regions and a harvest could be enough for a family for one or two years. However, this picture seems to now only exist in peoples' minds. Years of droughts have degraded this image and, in order to survive, people end up contributing to the process of desertification in the region through the cultivation of larger areas of land (De Waal, 2005:43 a).

This issue of environmental degradation by human activities is one of the topics identified by Homer-Dixon (1999: 46) as a factor that helps to create scarcity of natural resources, thus contributing to creating conditions that are prone to conflicts. The author classifies this matter as "supply-induced scarcity". In the case of Darfur, it seems that what appears to have been a natural response by the society to the times of drought, has further aggravated the situation in the region. This reaction which led to further soil degradation, can also be linked to some of the social effects caused by environment scarcity acknowledged by Homer-Dixon (1999:80) as factors that increase the possibility of violence. These effects include the decline in agricultural

and economic productivity, which in general affect, to a higher extent, the lower level of the society who are the most dependent on an ecological balance. According to the author, those two factors can also interact with three other social effects created by environmental scarcity – migration originated by the necessity of searching for new supplies of natural resources, division within society (normally along ethnic lines), and the decay of institutions such as the state. Social effects that present similarities with the scenario in Darfur.

Although extra crops are being planted in order for people to subsist, there is no increase in production. To demonstrate this, Fadul (2006) provides the example of a farmer that in 1968 cultivated around 1000 square meters of land and produced 84 sacks of millet (100kg). Six years later, in 1974, he planted more than double this area, and got only 43 sacks of millet. In 1984, the same farmer cultivated all his land, more than 5000 square meters, and his production was still 100 percent inferior to his harvest from the 60s.

The increase in areas cultivated also contributes to making land scarcer, expanding the competition for free space. Areas previously used by the nomads on their routes of passage become used for crop cultivation, thereby blocking the pastoralists' way. In addition, to avoid risks due to the climatic instability, more farmers start to invest in livestock, diminishing the grazing areas previously used by the nomads. As a further consequence, as Fadul (2006:38) notes "this encourages the millet farmers to be keen about their crop residue not being utilized communally by nomads' livestock." This depicts the fracture of a system that was once one of the bases of the "complementary relationship" between nomads and farmers described in the preceding section of this study.

The droughts affect the diverse ecological zones in Darfur with different levels of impact. In the northern region of Darfur, the region most affected, between 1946 and 2005, there was a reduction of 34 percent in the average rainfall. A large area of grazing land in the north became desertified during this period. In slight contrast, in the western region of Darfur the rainfall reduction was 24 percent and in the southern area 16 percent. This data and other statistics collected in the region do not indicate a positive future for Darfur: "rainfall is becoming increasingly scarce and/or unreliable in Sudan's Sahel belt, and this trend is likely to continue. On this basis alone, large

tracks of the Sahel will be severely impacted by declining food productivity over the next generation and beyond” (UNEP, 2007:60). In the most vulnerable areas of Sudan, such as in the north of Darfur, there is an expectation of a 70 percent decline in food production. While the signs point to a scenario where natural resources will become scarcer with time, the demand for them will tend to increase due to population growth, which in Darfur is around 12 percent per year, according to government figures (UNEP, 2007:84).

This matter is a further example of Homer-Dixon's (1999:15) classification of “supply-induced scarcity”. As the author explains, in a general context, the increase of people in a region results in a higher demand for natural resources. In other words, the same amount of resources such as cropland, or even less as in the case of Darfur due to the incidence of droughts, has to be divided by a larger number of people, thus escalating competition amongst groups and the potential for conflicts.

Although the earlier droughts in Darfur were also severe, none of them had such a large impact on the region society as the dry periods of 84/85. For Suliman (1993), there are three possible justifications for this. Firstly, the switch in the focus of food production from the internal market in the 1970s to the external market in the 80s. Secondly, the lack of reliance on traditional administration due to the government’s elimination of the system in the 1970s, a factor that will be analysed separately in the next section of this study. Lastly, the cumulative effects of years of multiple dry periods, culminating in a more intense diminishment of fertile land and resource scarcity from the 1980s.

Throughout the past droughts, and especially in the 1970s, many groups from the northern areas left their villages for the southern areas of Darfur and didn’t return to their original habitat. At that time, the tribes in the south welcomed these migrants, who would even be given land to cultivate. As an example of these successful migrants are some groups of the Zaghawa (Ibrahim, 1999). In those times, when land was still plenty, people still had the chance of moving to a “richer eco-zone” as described by Suliman (1997:5). However, during the droughts of 84/85, these opportunities become rare. As more groups started to move southwards, the tribes in the south, who were already struggling to survive, become alarmed and start to block

the entrance of the new guests. As Ibrahim, (1999:138) says, “formerly peaceful relations were disrupted. In some areas, immigrants outnumbered the indigenous populations.”

As observed by Tubiana & Tubiana (1977:5), in relation to the social issues created by the lack or abundance of water, when the rains are constant, nomads can use the areas to the north of Darfur. When there is no rain, the desert grows and the grazing areas disappear. Thus, “flocks and herds then go south, immediately raising the awkward problem of co-existence with the settled population living there, for the latter who, just like the nomads, have animals to water and feed and their fields are not spared by the drought.” This scarcity of natural resources, is also identified in a general context by Homer-Dixon (1999:96), who explains that the environmental decline, in conjunction with social, political and economic factors, tends to increase competition amongst groups, thus, sharpening the perception of divisions within those groups. As a consequence of the necessity for securing resources supplies, relations between groups can be damaged, prompting the segmentation and the polarisation of the affected society.

As the years of 84/85 became drier in Sudan, more groups turned their attention to the lands around Jebel Marra, one of the most fertile areas in the region and the habitat of sedentary farming tribes such as the Fur and the Masalit. As Suliman (1993, 23) notes, “realising that on this occasion the nomads intended to stay, the Fur reaction was far from welcoming.” In order to keep animals alive, nomads also had to initiate their annual migration journeys at earlier stages, when areas were still in use by the farmers. The droughts pushed them more and more towards the southern areas, thus creating an inevitable competition between the two main economic activities in Darfur (Fadul, 2006).

Although there is a lack of data providing empirical evidence, there were clear signs of impoverishment in the region as a whole. For the pastoralists, the droughts resulted in high numbers of lost herds (Huggins, 2004: 2). In this scenario of famine, the nomads’ tribes became the most vulnerable groups (Ahmed & Shazalli, 1999). An estimated 53 to 54 percent of the livestock in Darfur couldn’t withstand the years of drought in the 80s (De Waal, 2005:153 a). Many of the animals became too weak to



survive the longer migration journey that the pastoralists would have to take in order to search for water and pastoral areas. As quoted by De Waal (2005:152 a), one Furawiya herdsman once said to the author that he went to sleep and when he woke up, he found out that “half of my sheep had died that same night.”

As a natural response to the droughts, nomads started to sell their animals. The increase of 20 percent in herds on offer in the markets, more than the double the normal amount, resulted in the drop in the price of livestock. And it was the poor people that suffered the highest loss. The richer started to sell their livestock at the beginning of the crisis, getting better prices for their animals. The poorer waited until the last moment, when there was nothing left for them. When their animals got to the markets, the prices were already much lower (De Waal, 2005: 159 a).

The famine generated by the years of drought during the 80s killed an estimated 95,000 people in Darfur. The initial response from the government to the situation was of denial (Prunier, 2005). For Kajee (2006:78), this contributed to “strengthening the belief among Darfurians that their lives were of no account to the Arab elite in Khartoum.” This deepening of the grievances amongst the Darfurian society also appears to be, at least indirectly, linked with the motivations behind the insurgency movement. As Homer-Dixon (1999:106) argues, extreme environmental hazards such as droughts, in certain situations, can lead to conflicts. The author believes that these types of events, whilst contributing in making groups more divided, can also deteriorate institutions such as the state, thus, providing “challenger groups with opportunities for action against a state whose buffering capacity has been gradually eroded by civil war, corruption, economic mismanagement, rapid population growth, or deteriorating stocks of renewable resources.”

It was only in August of 1984 that Nimeiry, the Sudanese leader at the time, declared Darfur a “disaster zone”, requesting international help to deal with the matter (Prunier, 2005). The help came late and was far from adequate. As Bush (1988:11) says, “blanket distribution of grain in the early stages of relief meant that food sufficient for 1 million was distributed among 3 million – and very little of this went to pastoralists”. By then, it would seem that the effects of the ecological imbalance

had already contributed to damaging the traditional relationship between nomads and farmers. A societal order that hasn't been regained as of today.

Apart from the volatile natural environment, government policies on land rights and tribal administration in Darfur have also seemed to contribute to decaying relations among the society. These strategies that will be briefly examined next, appear to have had a direct influence on how the society in Darfur interacts with the environment, and in the creation of a deep feeling of grievance that fueled the rebel movement at the outset of the current conflict.

### **3.5 Government Policies Towards Land and Tribal Administration**

Generally speaking, throughout the early history of Darfur, land ownership was based on a system which was communal in nature. Tribes would have rights over their "dar", or piece of land. The division of the land amongst the individuals of the tribes was the responsibility of the leaders of each group. There was no such thing as private ownership. As long as an individual was cultivating the land, he or she would have the rights to the area. If the land was neglected for too long, it would be reallocated to another member of the tribe. As Ahmed & Shazali (1999:2) describe, "land use was legitimised through membership in a village community."

The land system in Darfur has undergone many changes through the years, however, since this is not the main focus of this study, this will not be examined in great detail. However, one key stage seems essential to understand the land aspect in Darfur, that of the introduction of the Land Act by President Nimeiry in 1970. The Land Act stipulated that all unregistered land from that moment forth, whether occupied or not, would become government property. Land in Darfur was mostly unregistered and, although the new regulation established usufruct rights, it opened avenues for further disputes between tribes, since in theory, the land that used to belong to a tribe was no longer their property. Furthermore, land became a commodity with high value, which prioritised access for the country's elite (Abu Sin & Takama, 2002).

As Johnson (2003:130) notes, "the Unregistered Land Act abolished customary rights of land use and access to land and set the formation for the central state's leasing of

land for large-scale farming schemes.” The advent of mechanised agriculture and its endorsement by the government meant less land for the farmers that were dependent on subsistence agriculture, and also for the nomads in Darfur, which in response had to further compete between themselves. By the end of the 80s in Sudan, the land used by 8,000 richer farmers was equivalent to the same area that had to be shared by 2.5 million poorer traditional farmers (Duffied, 1990:5). This trend was no different in Darfur. It is important to observe how this unjust division of land appears to have affected the society in Darfur, further embittering the people. When analysing the literature linked to the conflict environment theory, Conteh-Morgan (2004:244) notes how “land degradation coupled with unequal patterns of land-ownership intensify poverty by depriving numerous peasants of productive land.” In Darfur, seems that this issue was no different.

Another key element in Darfur's history was the tribal administration system, which was upheld by the British rulers when the region was annexed to Sudan in 1916. As previously illustrated, when free land was plentiful in Darfur and the lack of water wasn't as critical as in recent decades, relations between sedentary farmers and nomads used to be of reasonably peaceful coexistence. Their contrasting styles of life could instigate disputes from time to time over resource competition, but these conflicts were resolved through this tribal administration, without major repercussions. This traditional way of conflict resolution used to be fairly effective (Fadul, 2006:40).

According to this tribal administration, local courts were assembled and rules were introduced in order to regulate the grazing activities. The length of time that the nomads were allowed to stay on each area and the route system that established where the nomads could pass along their migration journeys were some of these rules (Ahmed & Shazali, 1999:7). As Abdul-Jalil (2004:5) explains, in the case of nomads, since they had to move from one place to another, more important than having an individual piece of land, was to be given access to multiple areas, which was “done through special arrangements between the traditional leaders of each party and according to which customary rights of each side were observed.”

The scarcity of land caused by the continuous droughts contributed to disrupting this system, and the nomads were the most affected, since they were mainly dependent on the goodwill of other tribes that had their own lands and were also affected by the droughts. A situation that was aggravated by the fact that some “Arab” tribes had never had rights to their dars. As Flint and De Waal (2005:9) note, “to this day, many Abbala Arabs explain their involvement in the current conflict in terms of this 250-year-old search for land granted to the Baggara but denied to them.” However, aggravating the situation was President Nimeiry's decision in the 70s of abolishing the tribal administration system, which was perceived as a 'colonial' system by the government at the time. This decision left a lack of authority exactly at the moment when tribal competition over scarce resources was becoming more frequent in the region (Jooma, 2006). In addition, the native administration was substituted for a system that replaced tribal leaders by putting in charge people from the central elite (Johnson, 2003:130). Lately, attempts to reestablish the traditional administration system were made, but with no success. It seems that by now, the system has lost its credibility among the people in Darfur, especially the younger community (Mohamed, 2002:7).

As Johnson (2003:130) resumes, “the cumulative effect of these legal and administrative reforms was that not only did political power continue to be concentrated in the central government, but control of the very land on which people lived and depended was transferred to those with access to that power.” This power concentration in the hands of a minority, to the detriment of areas such as Darfur and resulting in a lack of development and economic marginalisation, is the subject of the next section of this study.

### **3.6 Government Policy of Marginalisation**

Since the times of colonial power and independence, Sudanese governments have, in general, adopted a strategy of concentrating public investment in the centre of the country, around the capital city of Khartoum. This government approach resulted in an economic marginalisation of regions such as Darfur and the southern area of Sudan, which were kept isolated from the central power (Huggins, 2004, 2). These regions bear a general lack of development, which in times of natural hazards such as

droughts, contributes to placing them in a vulnerable situation (UNEP, 2007). Consequences of which were widespread famines and a growing competition over scarce resources. As the International Crisis Group (2004:4 b) states, “ecological decline and a lack of development in the entire region have combined to impoverish Darfur people of all ethnic backgrounds”.

This policy of marginalisation of areas away from central Sudan, as well as the power concentration in the hands of a minority elite, have been the focal points amongst the rebels’ grievances from the outset of their insurgency movement. The aforementioned anonymous (2000) “*Black Book: Imbalance of Power and Wealth in Sudan*”, which is claimed to be from the JEM rebel group, contains detailed information about the general power and economic concentration in Sudan. Cobham (2005), aiming to verify the veracity of the Black Book, draws a comparison in his article *Causes of Conflict in Sudan: Testing the Black Book* between the data available in the Black Book and recent official data from various organizations, including the World Bank and the Sudanese government. The author (Cobham, 2005:9) concludes that the results obtained in his study give “overwhelming support” to the information presented in the Black Book.

In the Black Book (2000), it is claimed that since 1956, all Presidents and Prime Ministers in Sudan were from a northern community that represents 5 percent of the total population of the country. In terms of primary school enrolment, the figure in Darfur is 31 percent, while in the north it is 88 percent of the total children in region. In Darfur, until the year of the document publication, there were 24.7 hospital beds per 100,000 people, whilst in the north this figure was 151 per 100,000 people. In relation to number of doctors, there were 1.9 doctors available in Darfur per 100,000 people. In the north, this number grows to 13.4 doctors for the same amount of people. In addition, the Black Book details how the Darfur region is deprived of a transport system and agricultural development projects. These statistics, which were also observed in a World Bank report on Sudan (2003), illustrate Abdul-Jalil's (2004) point that “Darfur is, therefore, a region that is suffering the double predicament of underdevelopment within an underdeveloped country.”

For Roden (1974), the negligence of successive governments towards many of the regions in Sudan is a strategic policy with the intention of keeping power in the hands of a minority. Furthermore, for the author, by keeping certain areas in poverty, the government can ensure that central development schemes would have a cheap available workforce.

The underdevelopment plight in Darfur indicates that the rebel movement indeed had a basis for their grievances, brought on by a history of economic, political and social marginalisation. Environmental conditions in the area contributed to exacerbating these grievances, making life more difficult - pitting one community against the other. An important point is that these frustrations were felt by all in Darfur. All tribes had grievances that could put them in opposition with the central government, instead of against each other. And thus, this thesis argues that the development of the conflict in Darfur into a war with ethnic characteristics appears to be strongly motivated by the government's counterinsurgency movement rather than by the hatred amongst different ethnic groups. The role of the environment in the origin of the conflict can be debated, but it does seem possible that this factor interacting with other social and political matters, had a strong contribution to creating a scenario that led to the conflict.

### **3.7 Is the Environment a Root Cause of the Conflict in Darfur?**

The link between the conflict in Darfur and environmental changes in the region is questioned by some scholars. Fouad Ibrahim (2004:4) argues that although conflicts over resources are a reality in Darfur, “they are not the true cause of the current brutal war.” For Ibrahim, there are enough available resources in Darfur. The main issue in the region is the lack of development and government attention towards the area, which results in the inability of the community to use these resources. Sorcha O’Callaghan from the UK-based Overseas Development Institute is also of the opinion that the environment factor's significance shouldn’t be overestimated, since this would mean a risk of oversimplifying the causes of the conflict in Darfur. For this researcher, global warming “has become such a trendy issue that everything is being packaged as climate change” (IRIN, 2007:1).

There is little doubt that Ibrahim and O'Callaghan's views are relevant, and they further justify that this thesis' argument is factual – that there is no single cause for a conflict such as the one in Darfur. As much as this war is not a pure “ethnic hatred” conflict by nature, neither is it a purely environmental conflict. It is important to recognise the roles of all the factors involved, the environmental changes, ethnicity issues, government manipulation, and various others that won't be examined in this study. As the UNEP report (2007:95) says, environment stress added to “creating the conditions for conflict to be triggered and sustained by political, tribal or ethnic differences.” In addition, even more vital as Fadul (2006:34) points out, “any attempt to solve the present conflict must consider the dimension and role of the natural resources as used by stakeholders in Darfur.”

Indeed, it seems difficult to confirm and establish in an empirical way how much the droughts contributed to creating conflict in the region, since other factors play their part too. Critics argue that, in general, there is not enough proof to show the link between the environment and the conflict, and that the environment is mainly a secondary factor amongst other issues of more importance (Richard, 2005:7). However, at the same time, changes in societal relations in Darfur over the years and the people's dependence and vulnerability to environment changes are not possible to ignore. Furthermore, It appears that, in fact, environmental matters were one of the main factors in modifying the perception of ethnicity in the region. A perception that would later become of extreme value to the government in manipulating the masses during its counter-insurgency movement. In this respect, as Homer-Dixon (1999:106) says, although causes related to the environment might not be sufficient to trigger conflicts, since in general they need to interact with other factors, they are not less important. As the author argues, in this scenario, no cause is stronger than any other, “or should be given more weight in the analysis.”

In addition, the escalating trend of conflicts related to resources competition in Darfur from the 1980s, especially after the severe droughts of 84/85, must be considered. Since the 80s, conflicts have shown a tendency toward tribal divisions that were not present in prior disputes. According to a list from Yousef Takana, in the period between 1968 and 1976, there were three main conflicts in the region related to resource competition. From 1976 to 1980, the author registers five such related

disputes in Darfur. And between 1980 and 1998, Takana lists 21 conflicts related to resources and livestock disputes in the area (International Crisis Groups, 2004:5 b). Another list of conflicts in the region from the UNEP report (2007) shows the same trend.

Amongst examples of these conflicts is the war that broke out between the Fur and the Zaghawa during the hardest times of the droughts of 84/85. Also during the 80s was the conflict between a unified group of Arab tribes against the Fur, which was one of the fiercest wars in the area at the time (Cook & Mironko, 2006). Note that the Fur, which is the tribe that occupies the most fertile land in Darfur, was involved in both of these conflicts.

These earlier conflicts in Darfur, in a way, had to a greater extent a more tribal characteristic than the current war in the region, since tribes were fighting each other for scarce natural resources (Prunier, 2005). However at that time, instead of acting in order to accommodate the disputes in the region, the government's strategy of "dividing and ruling" contributed to making the situation worse and the society further separated into two distinct poles. As Cook & Mironko (2006: 131) note, government forces demonstrated earlier signs of an alignment with "Arab" groups, to the detriment of the "African" tribes. One of these signs was the sense of impunity in relation to the invasions on the African land tribes. As Mohammed (2004:6) describes, "the camel nomads took advantage of this apparent unwillingness of the government to protect the Fur and the Masalit communities and pursued their own goal of gaining access to pasture and water in the Fur and Masalit homelands by force, or even grabbing dars for themselves."

When the conflict in Darfur acquired a more insurgent characteristic than the previous tribal feature, the government had the opportunity to exploit the ethnic divisions exacerbated by years of droughts and economic marginalisation in the region. It seems that the point made by Mueller (2000, 10) in relation to the conflicts in Yugoslavia and Rwanda, that ethnicity in these regions was more an "ordering device or principle" than a "crucial motivating force", also can be applied to the case of Darfur. As it will be examined next in this study, in the Sudanese government's counter-



insurgency movement, ethnicity appears to have been used as powerful weapon in the war.

## **Chapter 4: Janjaweed – an Ethnic Weapon of War**

Abdel Haman Duhr is the clan leader from the Maharia nomadic community in Darfur. In the recent years of turmoil, Abdel and his group's lives have undergone several changes. Their migrations in search of food and water have become more frequent and due to security concerns they can't stay in one place too long. But the journeys are shorter now – even though finding these resources has become more difficult. They live in fear. Although they claim not to be involved in the conflict, they are identified as “Arabs”, and are thus seen as enemies by the “Africans”, who used to be cooperative allies in the past. As Duhr says, “people are calling us Janjaweed, it is not secure, we can be attacked at any time” (IRIN, 2005:1 b). The same fear is also felt by the “Africans” in relation to the “Arab” militia, and is transparent in the accounts detailed in multiple reports from NGOs, the UN and the media in general. Indeed, it seems that now, as Wave Abdallah, another member of the Maharia community puts it, in Darfur, “the whole area is divided into Arab and Non-Arab” (IRIN, 2005:2 b).

When questioning the conflict theory based on “ancient ethnic hatred”, Keen (2000:22), argues that those who defend these schools of thought would have to “explain why a variety of ‘hostile’ people have been able to live peacefully alongside each other.” Keen (2000:22) also cites an example from Darfur, questioning how the “ancient ethnic hatred” could possibly explain why “the Baggara pastoralists of western Sudan have raided their fellow Arabs among the neighbouring Fur.” Certainly, these are vital questions when examining the situation in Darfur. Furthermore it seems relevant to enquire how it may be possible that the rebel conflict, which initially seemed to be based on political grievances with governmental installations as its targets, developed over time into a conflict with “ethnic hatred” characteristics?

An answer to some of these issues appears to lie in the government's military strategy of its counterinsurgency movement, to which this chapter turns its attention. When the government chose to fight the rebel movement using the Janjaweed as its principal weapon, a militia formed of certain “Arab” tribes from Darfur, it seems that the government also chose to use another powerful weapon – ethnicity. In employing the Janjaweed, it appears that the Sudanese government managed to manipulate and exacerbate the social divisions already present in Darfur. Divisions that in part, have

resulted from a series of droughts that brought famine and poverty to the region, as well as from government policies, as observed in the previous chapter. Upon examination, it would seem that these divisions have diverted the course of the conflict. As Tar (2005:143) analyses, “if the Sudanese government had not resorted to mobilising ethnic/racial divisions by recruiting the Janjaweed militia, the conflict could have stood exclusively as one between a marginalised region struggling to regain some form of equal treatment.”

It is important to note once again that other factors such as the increase of weapons in the region and the actions of the governments of Libya and Chad might also have contributed to dividing the people in Darfur, and assisted in creating the conditions that would later be exploited by the government. However, these factors lie outside the scope of this study and will not be further examined.

It was previously illustrated how the community in Darfur used to successfully co-exist and how the perception of identity was fluid in the region, with people moving between tribes depending on their economic interest and thus changing their identity. It now seems essential that, to understand the conflict in Darfur, it is also necessary to comprehend what changed in the region in terms of divisions related to ethnicity. Furthermore, key to understanding this alteration process is to realise, as Barth (1994:12) says, “how the mobilisation of ethnic groups into collective action is effected by leaders who pursue a political enterprise, and is not a direct expression of the groups’ cultural ideology, or the popular will.” In the context of Darfur, how the State and the elite are key actors in the construction of identities and how they have manipulated ethnicity perceptions in order to achieve their goals.

It seems relevant to take into consideration Horowitz' (1985:140) criticism towards theories that imply that the masses are driven and manipulated by the elites. A central question put by the author is “why do the masses follow?” Horowitz argues that these theories don't address “the significance of symbolic issues in ethnic conflicts”. The author's view is that the masses participate in conflicts on the “basis of individual comparison”, with people reacting “toward those who create uncertainty about the correctness of their own behaviour.” In this sense, although not fully explained by the “psychology of group juxtaposition”, Horowitz (195:181) maintains that no ethnic

conflict can be clarified without the analysis of the “emotional concomitants of group traits and interactions.”

Following this discussion, Turton (1997) points out that ethnicity can be a powerful instrument in driving the masses. However, at the same time, in order to use this instrument for political purposes, suitable conditions need to be present for the construction of ethnicity. It needs to be based on historical aspects that hold a connection with people’s lives, even if those notions of the past are presented in a distorted way. Accordingly, in order to be effective for the purpose of mass mobilisation, for Turton (1997:81), the analysis of the construction of ethnicity should be based on both “instrumental” and “primordial” characteristics. And as Turton (1997:81) concludes, it is essential to understand the “role of political leaders and intellectuals who make the primordial claim credible.”

As Brubaker (2004:40) puts it, “not all group-making projects succeed”. For the author, the success of the manipulation of the masses is directly dependent on availability of the cultural and psychological factors. However, at the same time, Brubaker argues that even if the lack of those factors may constrain possible group manipulation, in general, the possibility of “group-making strategies” are not nil. Furthermore, the author notes a point that seems relevant in terms of Darfur: “certain dramatic events, in particular, can serve to galvanise and crystallise a potential group or to ratchet up pre-existing levels of groupness.”

In Darfur, it seems that with the advent of the droughts resulting in resources competition, it contributed to creating this scenario described by Brubaker, or as stated by Turton (1997), the necessary suitable environment for the government to manipulate ethnicity as a weapon of war. A point that makes the afore-mentioned environmental factor even more crucial in the comprehension of the present situation in Darfur.

In order to understand the implications of the use of the Janjaweed in the conflict, it should firstly be examined who the members of the militia are and under which conditions they were recruited. It appears that it was from this selection process, that the government started to put into practice what has become its main military strategy.

#### **4.1 Janjaweed – The Government’s Instrument of Ethnic Manipulation**

Janjaweed, which has been commonly translated as “a man (a devil) on a horse”, is the popular name given to the militia allegedly employed by the government in its counterinsurgency movement in the Darfur conflict (International Commission of Inquiry on Darfur, 2005). The possible reasons why the government decided to use the militia as its military resource will be examined later in this chapter. For now, this study will focus on who the Janjaweed is.

The mobilisation of the Janjaweed started much earlier than 2003, the year regarded as the outset of the Darfur conflict. As explained by Flint & de Waal (2005:59), the government militia strategy was already in use in Darfur in 1991, when the Darfurian Daud Bolad, with the assistance of the SPLA rebel group from southern Sudan, attempted to initiate a rebellion in the south of Darfur, without success. As the atmosphere of government opposition grew in the region, the government increasingly armed the militias. It was in 2000, around the same time that the rebel attacks started in Darfur and when the government split between Turabi and the President al-Bashir, that the Janjaweed began to receive stronger support from the government. The militia were given vehicles, communication devices and a large amount of weapons, which in some instances, were collected “even in the police force”, as described by Flint & de Waal (2005:63).

It is alleged that at this time, the government and “Arab” Janjaweed leaders started to call on volunteers to join the militia, from as far afield as Chad and Nigeria. Around 20,000 volunteers were split between the multiple Janjaweed camps. As Flint & de Waal (2005:64) relate, from then on, these volunteers were “equipped and trained by the government.” Soon after, in 2002, the Janjaweed carried out its first major attack against the civilians of the Fur tribe, one of the main members of the SLM/A rebel group in Darfur. In the consequent years of turmoil, this type of civilian attack would become a regular occurrence.

Although the government throughout the course of the conflict has denied its involvement with the Janjaweed militia, even Musa Hilal, known as one of the major leaders of the militia, has admitted that he executes official orders. As Hilal said, “all

the people in the field are led by top army commanders” (Human Rights Watch, 2005:1). An official document obtained by the Human Rights Watch (2005:2) also indicates the government’s complicity with the militia. In the document, the instructions are clear: “security units in the locality” should allow and facilitate the militia “under the command of Sheikh Musa Hilal to proceed in the areas of [North Darfur] and to secure their vital needs.” In addition, the orders make clear that the authorities should “overlook the minor offences” committed by the militia against civilians.

Evidence of the Janjaweed's armament by the Sudanese government and the functioning of the militia was also collected during investigations made by the International Commission of Inquiry on Darfur (2005). According to a report from the Commission, the Janjaweed presents three divisions to its structure. The first of these divisions includes the members of the militia that are not directly affiliated with the government, although they do receive arms and supplies from official forces. Indirectly they work under government orders, but their organisation is based on a tribal system. In some instances, they have been acting independently for means of obtaining personal profits, originating from property looting.

The second division of the Janjaweed similarly has no legal links to the government, however, according to the Commission, members of the official army directly coordinate some of these groups in conjunction with tribal leaders. The last category of the militia comprises members from the Popular Defence Force, which is an official Sudanese armed force that recruits amongst civilians. Sudanese Law defines them as ‘Paramilitary Forces’. These forces are said to be recruited with the assistance of tribal leaders. The International Commission of Inquiry on Darfur (2005:28) quotes a tribal leader who says that “in July 2003 the State called on tribal leaders for help. We called on our people to join the PDF. They responded by joining, and started taking orders from the government as part of the state military apparatus.”

As the International Commission of Inquiry on Darfur (2005:34) states, there is abundant evidence that all three militia divisions have links between them. The PDF members receive payments from the government, as does the tribal militia division. In some instances, tribal leaders called to assist in the recruitment process are “paid in

terms of grants and gifts according to the success of their recruitment efforts.” In return for the goodwill of the “Arabs”, the government offers them compensation. They promise development in their villages, such as more schools, health units and water pumps (Flint & de Waal, 114).

Apart from food and other supplies, monthly salaries help to attract volunteers. New recruits to the militia can receive from US\$ 100 to US\$ 400, which in Darfur is a vast sum of money (Human Rights Watch, 2004:44). To put this in perspective, during the 84/85 famine in Darfur, the monthly wage in the region was less than US\$ 30, even though, at the time, most people couldn't even get a job (De Waal, 2005:145 a). This comparison clearly demonstrates that money also played its role in enlisting people in the government's counterinsurgency movement.

Although it seems that lately more people have started to join the militia due to the bipolar situation created in Darfur, where it has become almost impossible not to take sides, it appears that, especially at the beginning of the conflict, the people opting to join the Janjaweed wasn't a question of “ethnic hatred”, but more of survival and economic opportunity. Another opportunity exploited, mostly by high-ranking militia members, was the charging of “taxes” to guarantee safe passage on roads and for the right of farmers to plant (Human Rights Watch 2004.) As Flint & de Waal (2005:114) state, “while most Darfurians grew even poorer, Janjaweed commanders and security officers profited from a new economy of loot and extortion, growing rich on the misery of others – Arab and non-Arab.” These recruitment characteristics in Darfur, which seem to have been largely financially motivated, illustrate the “opportunistic” nature behind the reasons for members' adherence to these types of groups (Mueller 2000:8). For Mueller, this opportunistic approach might, at times, provide a clearer explanation for apparent “ethnic hatred” conflicts than would notions of identity.

It is important to observe that the recruitment of the members of the militia was also always done on a tribal basis and largely amongst people from “Arab” tribes that had suffered the most during the period of droughts. Many of them were tribes that never had rights to land (Flint & de Waal, 2005:47). It would appear that due to their poverty, they were more easily convinced to fight for the government's cause. A cause



that the government managed to sell to the “Arab” tribes as being *their* cause. Part of this propaganda was spread through another incentive given to those that would join the Janjaweed: the chance of freely looting “African” villages and the opportunity to acquire with total impunity the land of communities that some have envied for so long (Human Rights Watch, 1004:15). As Prunier (2005:80) describes, “it was not difficult for the Centre to mobilise what we earlier called the “native Arab” tribes for the defence of the Centre’s interest, even though the “native Arabs” were themselves in an economic and political situation not much better than the people they were going to be encouraged to kill.”

During its recruitment process, the government refused volunteers that didn’t belong to “Arab” tribes. The former army soldiers, who in general were identified as “Africans”, were left behind (Flint & de Waal, 2005:103). Later on, in order to gather more fighters for its cause, government officials also initiated propaganda to convince people of their “Arab” origins. An example is the Jebel Misseriya tribe, which is generally identified as an “African” tribe, but as previously explained, has a changeable identity akin to most of the groups in Darfur. In the attempt to coerce this tribe to join the militia, the technique used by officials was to convince them that they were in fact “Arabs”, likening the members of this tribe to their distant relatives in other areas of Darfur and Sudan (International Crisis Group, 2006:8).

These recruitment tactics, based on an “Arab” cause and not a government one, and specifically selecting “Arabs” to be the members of the main force that would fight the rebellion, with a clear focus on the attack of “African” tribes, seems to be a strong indication that this was a calculated process. A military strategy with the aim of dividing the Darfurians, and thus weakening the insurgency movement, whilst at the same time creating a conflict with ethnic features. As Tar (2005:143) says, “the provoked sleeping monster here is ‘ethnic tension and racial hate’ while its ‘provocation’ can be seen as the Sudanese government’s exploitation of ethnic/racial tension and hate by creating and supporting a militia force comprising of only one side of a long-standing tribal, recourse etc. conflict in a drive to contain another conflict.”

Apart from recruiting members with the assistance of tribal leaders, which added to deepening ethnic divisions in Darfur, the government also made use of convicted criminals to form the Janjaweed. It is said that one of the places that the militia leader Musa Hilal found his fighters was at the Kutum prison, where he ordered the “Arabs” to be released (Flint & de Waal, 2005:104). According to Flint & de Waal (2005:104), “many such men found a safe haven in the Janjaweed, whose own behaviour was defined by its unbound criminality.”

This aspect of the Janjaweed’s formation bears similarities to characteristics that Mueller (2000:1) identifies in the Croatian and Bosnian conflicts, where in some instances criminals were also released from prison in order to participate in what the author classifies as “very small bands of opportunistic marauders recruited by political leaders”. For Mueller (2000:1), these conflicts can be seen more as an outcome of the use of these groups rather than the alleged feelings of “ancient hatred” among the people. Accordingly, Brubaker (2004:40) observes that, in general, perpetrators of ethnic violence are not in fact ethnic groups, and they to a large extent do not represent the groups that they claim to stand for. For Brubaker, the perpetrators are rather “various kinds of organisations, broadly understood, and their empowered and authorised incumbents.” In the Darfurian context, these “organisations” and “authorised incumbents” can be seen as the government and the Janjaweed respectively.

Further points alluded to by Mueller (2000:1) also appear to be consistent with the Janjaweed’s method of action, which will be further examined in the next section of this study. As Mueller notes, these groups of criminals usually operate in conjunction with official authorities and in general target members of specific ethnic groups. In response, the latter seek protection amongst groups which they have closer ties and identify themselves with. As a result, acts of retaliatory violence can follow, as the victims of these criminal official bands might seek revenge. For Mueller (2000:2), such was the case in Rwanda, where the violence was propagated by a small group of people rather than a whole ethnic group against another – “the violence seems to have been the result of a situation in which common, opportunistic, sadistic, and often distinctly non-ideological marauders were recruited and permitted free rein by political authorities.”

In the case of Darfur, a factor that indicates that the Janjaweed is not representative of a whole ethnic group, or as Prunier (2005:97) says, not a “popular and organic expression of all Arab tribes in Darfur”, is that despite all the economic and opportunistic incentives, a number of “Arab” tribes refused to join the militia. As reported by Amnesty International (2004:2), at the outset of the conflict, tribes such as the Beni Hussein, which in general are classified as “Arab”, tried to distance themselves from the war. However, due to their refusal to integrate with the militia forces, this tribe became the target of Janjaweed attacks, where they would be called “Black Arabs”.

This difficulty of maintaining neutrality due to the action of groups such as the Janjaweed, was also identified by Mueller (2000) in his case studies of Yugoslavia and Rwanda. In these cases, when groups employed by elites to manipulate the conflict attacked another group, those who sympathised with the victims of the attacks were, in general, punished for it, or in some instances would be seen as enemies. Thus they would be left no option but to join the attackers, or risk their lives.

Despite this, in the northern regions of Darfur, according to a UNICEF doctor identified by the UN Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN) as Zeroual, there are still some Fur groups living amongst “Arab” tribes such as the Kabkabiya. “They have known the people [nomads] for a long time. They knew each other from previous migrations and agreed amongst themselves that there would be peace”, says the doctor. At the same time, Zeroual also explains that in some cases, these Fur groups have to pay for the “Arab” tribes to be allowed to stay in the area and receive protection (IRIN, 2005). As Amnesty International (2004:2) describes, it seems that the major risk in Darfur now is that “in short, differences between groups are becoming more manipulated and entrenched as the conflict worsens.”

Cases reported by the International Crisis Group (2005:13) of some “Arab” tribes that have been part of the Janjaweed, but have now started to realise that they are being used by the government to fight a war that is not theirs also illustrates the point that the Janjaweed militia is not fully representative of Darfur’s “Arab” community. It appears that some of these tribes are starting to see that the situation generated by the conflict is not only prejudicial for the “African” groups, but also for the “Arab” tribes.

In some instances, tribal leaders from these groups are reported to have been in contact with rebel members in order to seek alliances. In addition, some “Arab” tribes are apparently organising themselves to initiate movements similar to the rebels, with the intention of fighting the government forces (International Crisis Group, 2005:13)

Apart from the recruitment tactics employed by the Janjaweed, the pattern of the attacks followed by the militia also help to demonstrate one of the focal arguments of this study: that the exacerbation of the ethnic divisions in Darfur is in part the result of an opportunistic and manipulative military strategy by the Sudanese government. As will be seen next in this study, there is ample evidence to show that the government has always been behind the militia, and through this war strategy of directing violence toward specific ethnic groups, they spread racism and distrust through the community of Darfur.

#### **4.2 Janjaweed: On the Attack**

*“The imam, Yahya Warshal, ran from the mosque to his home to get his three-year-old grandson, who was an orphan. The Janjaweed followed him and killed him and the child. The youth of the village didn’t fight. They were running to save themselves. The Janjaweed galloped after them and killed them. More than 3,000 cows were stolen and goats and sheep, horses and donkeys. The Janjaweed wore khaki – the same as the army”*  
(Flint, 2004:12)

This quote from a Darfurian refugee in Chad who witnessed a militia attack on his village was given during a Human Rights Watch (HRW) interview in March 2004. The HRW has countless others, some far more violent. Corresponding with witnesses’ descriptions of indiscriminate killings, rape and destruction of villages are the reports of other NGOs, such as Amnesty International, who have been working in the area.

The International Commission of Inquiry on Darfur (2005:64) also collected similar testimonies whilst undertaking investigations in the area. According to the Commission, in general, the accounts of witnesses from the region illustrate a common pattern of attack that often involves a partnership of official forces and the

Janjaweed. It is early in the morning that most attacks take place. The attackers capitalise on the fact that at this time people in the villages are still sleeping or praying. Once the attacks begin, they can last for hours, and the same community can be the target of violent action on several occasions in a short period of time.

The official military forces are often the first to act. They can arrive in vehicles, but it is usually the military air force that initiates the assaults with heavy bombardment of the villages. Next to arrive are the members of the Janjaweed, on horses, camels or eventually in vehicles, all of which are often said to be provided by the government. They loot the villages, finish off what has been left intact, and certify that the villages have been abandoned or everyone has been killed. The militia members often wear uniforms similar to the ones used by the official army. Occasionally the Janjaweed uniforms have a horse symbol in the area of the shoulder. In instances, witnesses say that they knew their attackers from times prior to the conflict. Most of the communities targeted are from the Fur, the Masalit or the Zaghawa, the main groups participant to the rebel movement. But in general, although in lesser intensity, any “African” tribe can be attacked (International Commission of Inquiry, 2005:64).

The Janjaweed attacks with the government forces originated prior to 2003, as already explained, but it was since 2004 that they became more severe. This is illustrated in a quote from a Masalit refugee: “there have been three attacks [on my village] since October 2003, but the last attack [in early January 2004] was the worst. The first time, the men on camels and horses came and frightened us, but in the third attack they came by car and killed a lot of people.” The same refugee says that people in the community asked why the members of the militia were doing it. Part of the reply was that “orders came from above” (Human Rights Watch, 2004:21). It would appear that this evident increase in the intensity of attacks may coincide with the government’s realisation that it would take more than just frightening the community to end the insurgency. And with more pressure coming from the international community, which was still concerned with the deal to end the war in southern Sudan, the situation in Darfur needed to be quelled. As Prunier (2005:97) says, the government “had clearly decided on a military solution for the crisis, counting on being able to crush the insurrection fast enough for it to be over before the delicate process of bringing the SPLA into Khartoum could take place.” As detailed in chapter two, the first years of

the conflict in Darfur overlapped with the peace negotiation process aimed at ending the southern civil war.

This pattern of attack by the militia with a strong focus on civilians and steady support from government forces, as Prunier (2005:153) notes, is one of the many signs that indicate that the conflict in Darfur is not by nature an ethnic clash between different tribes. As Prunier (2005:153) adds, conflicts such as the prior disputes over resources in Darfur, which were also not purely based on “ethnic hatred” but did contain some characteristics along these lines, don’t feature a systematic pattern of attack, as is present in the current war. “When Darfur villages were bombed by Antonov aircraft and strafed by combat helicopters, this was not the work of spontaneously violent local nomads”, argues Prunier (2005:153). This fact helps to illustrate that the violence propagated in Darfur doesn’t appear to be the actions of “Arabs” against “Africans”, but the actions of the government with the calculated use of a group of “Arabs”, resulting in the exacerbation of the society’s divisions.

Some Darfurians also seem to realise that it is not in reality the “Arabs” that are attacking the “African” villages, despite the government's use of the Janjaweed on the ground possibly giving this impression. An elderly Masalit refugee commented to the Human Rights Watch (2004:16) that “before there was conflict, it is true, but now when a village is burned then automatically a helicopter descends to reinforce the Arabs. Whenever a village resists, then the plane comes down, so for me it’s not the Arabs, it’s the government that is different from before.” The coordinated work of the government and the Janjaweed in Darfur has affected the intensity of disputes in the region, as clearly demonstrated by this quote from another Darfurian refugee: “they [the Janjaweed] were shouting ‘Kill the Nuba! Kill the Nuba!’ All this is because we are black. We could defend ourselves against the Arab nomads, but not against the Janjaweed. The government has given them very good guns and attacks with them” (Flint, 2004:30).

Furthermore, the use of words with strong racist messages also seems to be a form of propagating the idea of a Darfur divided along “Arab” and “African” lines. According to witnesses interviewed by Amnesty International (2004), during attacks, it is common for the members of the Janjaweed to use phrases such as “you are opponents

to the regime, we must crush you, as you are black, you are like slaves.” It appears that, since the Janjaweed follow orders from the government as confirmed by their own leader Musa Hilal, this terminology can also be used as part of a military strategy aimed at giving the conflict an ethnic nature. Even if not part of a calculated strategy, this language use seems to indicate on which ethnic lines the members of the militia have been selected, and for which purpose they have been recruited.

Cases of rape are common during attacks. According to findings from the International Commission of Inquiry on Darfur (2005:66), rape is generally said to be perpetrated by members of the Janjaweed, but there is also information pointing to the involvement of government soldiers on some occasions. A report from the Special Rapporteur of the UN Commission on Human Rights (2006:16) also confirms a high number of rapes in Darfur. It describes cases of women that, when attacked, were told to ““get ready to be raped”. When the women resisted, the militia fired their guns into the air to intimidate them, calling them “tora bora” – a derogatory name for rebels – and “black slaves”.”

The incessant attacks in Darfur have had a devastating effect on the region, generating a high number of refugees and casualties. In the initial years of fighting alone, the International Commission of Inquiry estimated that more than 700 villages had been completely destroyed. However, as the Commission observed, it is difficult to obtain precise statistics in relation to the situation in Darfur. A police assessment at the same time allegedly reported that around 2,000 villages had been vanquished (International Commission of Inquiry, 2005:64).

In most cases, the International Commission of Inquiry on Darfur (2005:64) noticed that attacks on villages and civilians occur without valid military justification. A fact that indicates that the “civilian population has been knowingly and deliberately targeted to achieve common or specified objectives and interests of the government and the Janjaweed”. This is an essential point, since in many instances, in justifying the attacks on villages, the government has been claiming that rebel forces were hiding in these areas, and thus the attacks were necessary.

It is important to understand that due to the limited access to most areas in Darfur, nearly all facts collected from the ground are based on eyewitness accounts. However, in some instances, factual proof of the Janjaweed's action in conjunction with government forces has been gathered. An example are the declarations from official forces, including even President al-Bashir, confirming the employment of the militia. In general, the government has always denied its link with the Janjaweed, but in multiple instances it has been seen to contradict itself. An example is the President's quote that the government would "use the army, the police, the mujahadeen, the horsemen to get rid of the rebellion" (Prunier, 2005:109), and the Sudanese Foreign Minister's statement in 2004 that "the government may have turned a blind eye toward the militias" and that this "is true, because those militias are targeting the rebellion."

Another illustration of how civilians have been amongst the government's targets comes from a transcript of a radio conversation between a commander and an Antonov pilot during an attack. During the talks taped by a British journalist, the Commander on the ground reports that people were still in the village. The pilot asks if the people are on the government's side, and after the answer comes that the people said they were willing to work with them, the pilot states that the village people are "liars. Don't trust them. Get rid of them." Some time later, the pilot's feedback is "now the village is empty and secure for you. Any village you pass through you must burn. That way, when the villagers come back they'll have a surprise waiting for them" (Flint & de Waal, 2005:107).

The large sense of impunity in relation to Janjaweed members' crimes further signifies that the use of militias in attacks against specific communities appears to be part of a conscious military plan. In a case described by the International Commission of Inquiry on Darfur (2005:68), victims of a Janjaweed attack identified the members of the militia, who were still close to the attacked village and holding the property stolen during the assault. The victims attempted to report the case to government soldiers, but the answer was that they had superior orders to not take any action against members of the militia. As a Zaghawa tribal leader said, "when the Janjaweed burned a village, our people went to the police, but the government didn't care about it. But if a Zaghawa attacked Arabs, they went quickly to kill the Zaghawa" (Flint & de Waal, 2005:65). This freedom of action provided to the militias also appears to



have been key in deepening societal divisions in Darfur. As the International Crisis Group (2006:5) outlines, “unchecked banditry and militarisation of social relations have exacerbated the fracturing of Darfur society.” They cite the case in 2005 of an attack by members of the Fellata “Arab” tribe on the Masalit villages in southern Darfur, which “broke a history of mostly peaceful relations between the tribes.”

Cases like the afore-mentioned seem to have become a rule, rather than an exception in the conflict of Darfur. As time passes, it seems to be more difficult for groups to remain neutral in the conflict, and not be identified as being on the “Arab” or the “African” side. As De Waal (2005: 200 b) notes, “identity markers that had little salience in the past are extremely powerful today, and the overwhelming reason for this is the appalling violence inflicted on people.” It appears that the government's strategy of ethnicity manipulation has been effective. The government was the main focus of the rebels' attacks, and more so since their employment of the Janjaweed, but they have now managed to turn the insurgency's attention to the “Arab” tribes who, as Prunier (2005:80) says, “unfortunately” became the “ethnic groups locally perceived as supporting the government oppression”. In this sense, ethnicity cannot be seen as a single root of the conflict of Darfur, but rather as an instrument used to mobilise groups and deepen perceptions that they are opposed to each other.

There are many possible reasons why the government has adopted this particular strategy of war. These are the subject of the following section of this study. As will be examined next, what seems evident is that the Sudanese government has found, in the use of militias, a very effective way of keeping power. Not only is this true in terms of Darfur, but for Sudan as a whole.

### **4.3 Militias - The Bigger Picture**

The use of militias by successive governments as part of a military strategy is not a recent practice in Sudan. Tribal militias were also employed in the fight against the rebel movement in southern Sudan since the early stages of the war, and their use particularly intensified after 1985, with the fall of President Nimeiry and the introduction of Sadiq al-Mahdi's government. It was then that the Murahalin militia, mainly composed of the southern Darfurian and Kordofan “Arab” tribes Misiriyya

and Reizegat, were given full technical and military support from the government in exchange for them fighting the members of the SPLM southern rebel group. In these early days, President al-Bashir was one of the major supporters of the militias' use, and when he came into power after deposing al-Mahdi in 1989, he kept with the strategy (Johnson, 2003).

In the case of the Murahalin, and as it was later in Darfur, economic incentives such as free looting opportunities were amongst the chief reasons why members of specific tribes decided to join the militia. As Johnson (2003:82) says, “many pastoralists had not only lost stock in the drought, but had been dispossessed of land-use rights by the mechanised agricultural schemes. Thus in the late twentieth, as in the mid-nineteenth century, some Northerners were impelled towards the exploitation of southern Sudan in part by their own dispossession and loss of entitlements.”

Shortly, these same groups that were given weapons to fight the rebels in the south, would start to use their arms during disputes over resources in Darfur (O’Fahey, 1996:265) This would seem to indicate that since those early stages, the government armament of “Arab” militias to fight the southern war was already having effects on the societal balance in Darfur. In addition, as Mohammed (2004:6) notes, these earlier alliances promoted by the government, contributed in motivating some “Arab” groups in seeking a harder “confrontation strategy” by their own hands in order to gain space in an environment of increasing resource competition. An attitude further encouraged by the sense of impunity demonstrated by the government toward these groups’ actions.

The militia's employment in the government's fight in the southern conflict also assisted in dividing the people in the south, with violent results. However, at that time, apart from the economic incentives, the government also based its call on religious differences, on the idea of Muslims fighting Christians. In the case of Darfur, since it was the Muslims who were rebelling against the central power, the government had to use another approach in its technique of “divide and rule” – the use of ethnicity as a way to manipulate the masses in the region (Tar, 2005:137). An approach that inflamed the conflict in Darfur, as it further exacerbated the already complex divisions in the area. As Flint & de Waal (2005:102) observe, “the people who decided to use

the Janjaweed as a counterinsurgency force knew exactly what it would mean. They had used similar militias in the Nuba mountains in the early 1990s, and in the contested oilfields of Southern Sudan starting in 1998, and had seen the results. Now they were planning a replay.”

In Prendergast's (2005:2) view, in whichever situation, the main objective of the Sudanese government is to “maintain power at all costs.” The civil war of Darfur represents a greater risk to the central power of Sudan than the southern war ever has, since the rebel movement symbolises a break within the Muslim community, and it seems that the government was willing to use “whatever means necessary” to win the battle, even if this meant firing up an ethnic conflict in the region.

As previously mentioned, the political and economic grievances were mutual for all groups in Darfur, and not only for the “Africans”. As pointed out by the International Crisis Group (2006:3 b) “from its inception the SLA has had commanders and fighters from the region’s main Arab groups, such as the Reizegat cattle herders of southern Darfur.” This, and the fact that these same grievances were also shared by other northern regions apart from Darfur, meant that the rebellion in the region could also set the example for other areas in the country, unleashing an uncontrollable situation for the government (Ibrahim, 2004:7). Due to the gravity of the situation, the government found that it needed to be swift in dealing with the new insurgency movement in Darfur, before the rebellion could spread to other parts of the country. At the same time, it had to find a way to do it without having to agree a possible power sharing, as it was doing in order to negotiate a peace deal to end the southern war (International Crisis Group, 2006). It appears that it was in the use of the Janjaweed that the government believed it had found a solution.

For Tar (2005:146,147), there were three main possible reasons why the government decided to employ the Janjaweed. Firstly, it couldn’t trust the official army, since most of its soldiers were from the Darfur region and from mainly “African” tribes. Secondly, it believed that the nomad groups' wide knowledge of the Darfur area could be useful in crushing the rebellion. Lastly, and a “stronger reason” as the author says, due to the militia members' history of increasing disputes with the main tribes that composed the insurgency movement, the Janjaweed were seen by the government as

“better poised to face both rebel groups and their ‘anti-established’ civil communities.”

While taking these points into consideration, it is important to also consider additional motives that may lie behind the government's decision of employing the Janjaweed. For example, the influence on the Darfur conflict of the split between Hassan Al-Turabi and the government, previously cited in chapter two. For Flint & de Waal (2005:63), the alleged involvement of Turabi with the JEM rebel movement gave further reason for the government to fear the new insurgency coming from Darfur, thus, prompting the armament of the militia. This possible reason for the Sudanese government's use of the Janjaweed seems to concur with Brown's (2001:17) argument that conflict causes are directly related to the actions of the domestic elite, which can propagate violence based on three different premises, depending on the circumstances. These are “ideological struggles”, “criminal assaults on state sovereignty”, as in the case of trafficking of drugs, and “power struggles between and among competing elites.” In the case of Darfur, it seems possible to agree with Brown's point of view related to the elite's “power struggle” due to Turabi's role in the conflict. Although it should also be kept in mind that there seems to be more than one root that can possibly explain the Darfur conflict. Turabi's role may well be a crucial one, but other factors examined in this study don't appear to be of less importance.

At this stage, although not part of the main scope of this study, it seems relevant to briefly mention how in a way, Turabi indeed might also have managed to manipulate the masses in Darfur against the government for his own purpose to return to power. Whilst indeed the grievances in the area were many, Turabi, who had full knowledge of the situation, also appears to have used these grievances in order to mobilise his people. This point is echoed in Brown's argument that it is the “decisions and actions of domestic elites that often determine whether political disputes veer toward war or peace.” In this sense, perhaps, if Turabi was still in power, the conflict in Darfur might have taken a different slant.

The strategy of using the Janjaweed to divide the people in Darfur, and thus weaken the insurgency movement, also seems to have evolved into a positive point for the

government in its struggle against Turabi. As the International Crisis Group (2006:3) says, the government has succeeded in “localising and redirecting grievances so that it (the government) is no longer their target.” As a result, the government has also managed to weaken Turabi’s mobilisation.

Another aspect in the use of the militia is that since the government, in general, denies its involvement with the Janjaweed, it can claim to be innocent from any accusations of crimes committed during the war by the militia, given that it is not an official army. And through the use of the Janjaweed, it seems that the government could create characteristics to the conflict that are useful in labelling the civil war as just another “tribal war and not a political issue or a question of genocide”, as stated by the second vice-president Ali Osman, who concluded his statement saying that “in fact we are dealing with a typical situation which is very common in Africa” (International Crisis Group, 2006:9).

In portraying the civil war in Darfur as a mere tribal conflict and not as a political and economic insurgency, apart from managing to exacerbate divisions in the area, the government was also able to win time from the growing international community's pressure (Tar, 2005). It appears that to some extent, at least in the early years of the conflict, part of the international community indeed accepted the government's label, given that it was more worried about solving the civil war in the south, as described in chapter two.

This same labelling of the conflict “Arabs” against “Africans” was also useful for the government in dividing the international community. Apart from economic motivations that impeded the international community from reaching a common position on how to deal with the conflict, the government also made use of this label to claim that the interest of countries such as the U.S. in Darfur was based on a political agenda and not on humanitarian interests. This may well be true, since it seems that domestic interests in general shape countries' foreign policy strategies. However, in using this label, as De Waal (2005: 200 b) notes, the government has “used the term ‘Arab’ to its advantage, by appealing to fellow members of the Arab League that Darfur represents another attempt by the West (and in particular the United States) to demonise the Arab world.” In classifying the conflict of Darfur as a

war of “Africans” against “Arabs”, the government has been drawing a comparison of Darfur with Iraq and Palestine, where “Arab implies global victimhood”, iterates De Waal (2005: 201 b).

Indeed, this association in Darfur of “Arabs” as “global victims” has been used by some authors such as Mandami (2007), already mentioned in chapter two, and Howard (2007), in questioning why the world is not paying attention to the Democratic Republic of Congo as it is doing to Darfur at the moment. As Howard (2007, 1) says, “the key difference between the two situations lies in the racial and ethnic composition of the perceived victims and perpetrators. In Congo, black Africans are killing other black Africans in a way that it is difficult for outsiders to identify with.” The author continues saying that “in the United States and elsewhere those who have spearheaded the case of foreign intervention in Darfur are largely the people who regard the Arabs as the root cause of the Israel-Palestine dispute. From this viewpoint, the events in Darfur form just one part of a much wider picture of Arab malice and cruelty.” For Howard (2007), the U.S.' interest in Sudan is primarily based on the oil resources of this country and the U.S.' economic rivalry with China, which is one of the main business partners of Sudan.

It is interesting to note how, in a way, the label of “Arabs” against “Africans” can be used from different perspectives, depending on the context and who is considered the victim and who is seen as the perpetrator. As De Waal (2005 b) points out, at the same time that the government has used the term “Arab” to its advantage, in certain aspects, the term “African”, especially in the current 'war on terror' climate, has also been useful for the rebels. “It is scarcely an exaggeration to say that the depiction of “Arabs” killing “Africans” in Darfur conjures up, in the mind of a non-Sudanese, a picture of bands of light-skinned Arabs marauding among villages of peaceable black-skinned people of indeterminate religion”, states De Waal (2005:200 b).

Irrespective of who uses chooses to use these ethnic labels, it seems that in terms of the government, its military strategy has generally worked well so far. Although it has been under stronger pressure from the international community, it has managed to avoid any major political and economic sanctions. As seen in chapter two, whilst it has promised to disarm the Janjaweed in multiple peace talks, it has not fulfilled this

as of yet. On this issue of disarming the Janjaweed, it seems relevant to note that as Flint & de Waal (2005:122) argue, in fact, the government might have lost control over the Janjaweed, thus being unable to disarm the militia even if it has promised to do so.

Supporting the argument that the government's strategy of 'divide and rule' appears to have been efficient in its goal of maintaining power, is the fact that the rebel groups are becoming more divided with time and also becoming further involved in violence against civilians, and thus losing the original support of the international community. Much of this division seems to be the result of manipulative government propaganda. "Rebel groups are increasingly disorganised and fragmented as the regime's divide to conquer strategy has succeeded in upsetting the uneasy alliances forged in the early days of the conflict", states Prendergast (2005:6).

As the International Crisis Group (2006) points out, the government's intentions of dividing the rebels is revealed in an article published in a Sudanese newspaper with links to President al-Bashir. The article describes a supposed document that details how the Zaghawa tribe wants to dominate Darfur and eliminate the other tribes in the region. For the International Crisis Group, the article is an indication of how the government uses propaganda to pit the tribes that compose the rebels groups against each other. As with this article, making the other tribes believe that the Zaghawa are using the insurgency in order to dominate the region.

It should also be noted in this case how the government campaign has used the media, which is largely controlled by the state, in order to manipulate the masses. As Barth (1994:21) notes, "the control and manipulation of public information and discourse is an extremely important part of the activities of every regime." The same point is picked up by Turton (1997) in relation to Yugoslavia, where through the media and especially through TV, the government disseminated its nationalist propaganda. And in Sudan it would also seem that the media has played its role in assisting the government's policy of ruling the country through dividing the people.

#### **4.4 Dividing the People**

The Sudanese government seems to have been, in general, a major supporter of policies that entail community divisions as a means of weakening any form of possible opposition to its dominance. This is not only apparent in their military tactics as examined earlier in this chapter, but also from an administrative side. A case that illustrates this point is the division of Darfur in 1994 into three states – the Northern, Southern and Western states. In separating the region, the government also split the land of the Fur tribe, which is located around the Jebel Marra area. “The reform divided the Fur, the largest tribe in Darfur, among the three new states, making them minorities in each and significantly reducing their influence”, state Flint & de Waal (205:58). Furthermore, through this administrative reform, new positions were created in the local government, with most of those being granted to members of “Arab” tribes considered government allies (Flint & de Waal, 2005).

Another example of how these divisions were deepened was the government’s decision in 1995 to divide the original land of the “African” Masalit tribe into 13 separate areas, distributing five of those to “Arab” groups. This fact is seen as one of the major issues that prompted a subsequent conflict between the Masalit and the “Arab” nomads that lasted from 1996 to 1998 (International Crisis Group, 2004:7 b).

It seems that when opting to use the Janjaweed instead of the army to fight the rebels, the government was once again adopting this type of strategy. By doing so, it could blame the conflict on the diversity amongst the people of Darfur, rather than on the effects of its own policy of marginalisation towards the areas away from the central power. As Johnson (2003:141) says, “successive governments have tried to dismiss the fighting that has broken out in the North and along its frontier with the South as merely ‘tribal’ clashes that have got out of hand. They have claimed this even as they have fuelled such fighting with official and semi-official support to so-called tribal militias.”

As seen in chapter three, factors such as resource competition stemming from a long history of droughts in the area, along with the interplay of social, political and economic matters did seem to contribute to disrupting the previous societal order in



Darfur, and thus increasing divergences amongst the various Darfur tribes. However, as Johnson (2003:141) notes, the major issue is that these divisions “can be used for the mobilisation of political and military support, but that mobilisation has persisted for wider goals than disputes over grazing and water rights.”

The complexity of ethnicity indeed is an essential issue in Darfur and its importance should not be underestimated. Yet, after considering the two main focuses of this study – environmental factors in Darfur and their influence on society, and the government’s military strategy of identity manipulation – it seems that the conflict in Darfur cannot be conclusively explained based only on an “ethnic hatred” argument. The diversity among the people did play its role in the civil war, but this role appears to have been more as a weapon of war than a root cause of the conflict. This weapon, manipulated by the government to serve their own interests, seemed to grow a life of its own, creating a situation where people in the region had to identify themselves with one group or another, leaving little room for neutrality. The earlier concept of changeable boundaries between the groups of Darfur has been shattered. As time passes, it seems that this ideal is being left behind in the dust, and with it fades the prospect of peace.

## **Chapter 5: Conclusion**

When Robert Zoellick stated in 2005 that the conflict in Darfur was a Sudanese “tribal war” in which foreign forces shouldn’t get involved, to what extent was the U.S. Deputy Secretary of State correct? How much can the ‘ethnic hatred’ explanation say about the civil war that has killed more than 200,000 people in the region, creating as claimed by the U.N., the “world’s worst humanitarian crisis”? As seen throughout the last four chapters of this thesis, the conflict in Darfur appears to indeed be related to issues of ethnicity. However, these don’t seem to have acted independently as a single root of this civil war. In terms of Darfur, it therefore seems possible to agree with Brown’s line of thought (2001:4) - that conflicts can’t be explained by a sole factor, but only by the analysis of the combination of causes that interplay together in creating conditions prone to wars.

From these multiple causes that seem to have interacted as roots of the conflict in Darfur, this study has focused on two particular factors - the environmental changes that have been occurring in the region and their effects on the Darfurian society, and the government's employment of the Janjaweed militia as a possible means of ethnic manipulation. As outlined in the thesis introduction, these two factors were chosen as the focal points of this study due to their link to the ethnicity issue, and also, because of the potential correlation between them.

As pointed out in chapter 1, one of this thesis' arguments was that the many droughts that have been occurring in Darfur and other environmental issues have contributed in dividing the society, thus creating the opportunity for the government to utilise these divisions with the intention of manipulating the initial insurgency movement along ethnic lines. Although this thesis' author realises that additional empirical data would be necessary in order to prove this argument, the evidence presented from secondary sources throughout this study seems to indicate that this line of thought does indeed hold relevance in understanding the present conflict in Darfur. Furthermore, this research appears to point towards the fact that the civil war in the region goes beyond the “ethnic hatred” explanations of “Arabs” versus “Africans”, which was the principal argument that this study challenged. In addition, the key topics on which this thesis has been focused have also provided an indication of matters that should be addressed if the purpose of achieving peace in Darfur is to be realised.

#### **4.1 The Environmental Factor**

As examined in chapter 3, the current identity formation in Darfur seems to be more the result of a constructivist process than from primordial feelings, hence, indicating an instrumentalist point of view. As research from Haaland (1972) and O'Fahey (2004) demonstrate, in a not-too-distant past, ethnic boundaries in Darfur were more correlated to economic activities than cultural and racial notions. An aspect that seems to follow Barth's (1994:12) thought that, in a general context, ethnic notions are strongly related to situational factors, rather than primordial. As illustrated in detail in chapter 3, it was natural for members of an "African" tribe, who in general have a more sedentary agricultural way of life, to move to "Arab" tribes, commonly associated with a nomadic occupation. The mix between the more than 80 different tribes in Darfur has also been exaggerated by a history of intermarriage between groups. In this regard, it is important to note O'Fahey's (2004:24) thoughts that the notion of ethnic homogeneity never existed in Darfur. Following this argument, it seems possible to conclude that, in fact, the divided perception of "Africans" or "Arabs" cannot reflect the true composition of the Darfurian society. If this division is how the present situation is recognised in Darfur, as De Waal (2005:xiv a) points out, it seems that this has been more the effect of external factors than primordial feelings.

In this constructivist process, it appears that environmental factors are key in understanding how the society in Darfur went from a relation where ethnic boundaries were fluid, to one of conflict, where people identify themselves as "Arabs" or "Africans". As seen in chapter 3, the region's society as a whole has a relation of extreme dependence on the environment, since the majority of the people rely on agricultural activities as their only means of survival. Due to this dependence, the society is highly vulnerable to environmental hazards such as droughts, desertification and soil deterioration. A case point that illustrates Homer-Dixon's (1999) line of thought, which argues that the communities that depend more on agricultural activities, especially subsistence forms of agriculture, are the ones more susceptible to violence indirectly caused by environment scarcity matters.

The multiple droughts that have been affecting Darfur, especially the arid years of 84/85, have contributed to exacerbating the competition for resources in the region,

and consequently aided in breaking the social order in the area and pitting groups against each other. When land and resources were abundant in Darfur, “Arab” nomads and “African” agriculturalists, used to have an accord of collaboration. An accord that seems to demonstrate Horowitz's (1995:113) point of view that the fact that different groups practice unlike activities can minimise competition within groups, since in this way, by producing diverse goods, one group in general depends on the other. Although Horowitz seems to be correct when pointing out this economic correlation between groups, it appears that in Darfur, in part, this natural order was disrupted by environmental factors which generated scarcity of resources – which were used communally by both the nomads and the agriculturalists.

The occurrence of droughts and desertification in Darfur affected the vital migration patterns in the region. Nomads that used to be accommodated by agriculturalists in certain times of the year, had to initiate their journeys earlier in search of pasture for their animals. This fact added in creating friction between the groups. Visitors that before were welcome to a certain extent, proceeded to be seen as invaders in a growing scenario of scarcity, where everyone was struggling for survival. This migration issue stems from factors like resources scarcity, population growth and environment deterioration, which are all identified in a general context by conflict theories related to the environment. As Homer-Dixon (1999) maintains, these types of factors, when interplayed with other social, political and economic aspects, can indirectly assist in creating situations prone to conflict, with these being most likely to occur within states. According to Homer-Dixon (1999), these conflicts in general develop as disputes between diverse ethnic groups, or even as insurgency movements. An argument that appears to bear close similarities to the Darfurian case.

Opponents to the environmental conflict theory may argue that this line of thought is weak, in general not proven and not sufficient to explain a conflict (Richard, 2005) such as the one in Darfur. Furthermore, the “optimists” may criticise that environmental factors can be overcome by societies, if they have the access to the technology or the necessary means to deal with these matters, thus, implying that these conflicts are more related to factors other than resource scarcity (Kahl, 2000). This thesis's author would concur with this view, since issues such as economic and political marginalisation and government policies towards the land and tribal

administration in Darfur have all helped towards creating a scenario prone to conflict. However, at the same time, it is key not to downplay the role of the environment. In this regard, as Homer-Dixon (1999) argues, the classification of factors by their level of importance is not valid, since all factors linked to conflicts must be analysed independently, whether they are social, political, economical, or related to the environment.

Furthermore, it appears to be feasible to conclude that by understanding the role played by environmental conditions in dividing the people of Darfur due to resource competition, it is also possible, at least in part, to comprehend how the government managed to use ethnicity as a strategy of war in the region. The evidence presented in this study seems to indicate that the multiple droughts and the process of desertification in Darfur may have deepened the people's grievances. As explained in chapter 2, these grievances related to general policies of marginalisation towards Darfur, reflected in the lack of development in the region as a whole, were amongst the initial motivations behind the insurgency movement of the SLA and JEM rebel groups against official government institutions. However, more important than the contribution of the droughts to the general feeling of grievance in Darfur, seems to be the effects of these environmental hazards on the perceptions of identity in the region, as explored in chapter 3. It appears that, whilst aiding the division of the Darfurian society, the droughts and related issues contributed to creating suitable conditions for the government to manipulate the masses and label the initial insurgency along ethnic lines.

#### **4.2 The Janjaweed Militia Factor**

The government's use of the Janjaweed militia in its counterinsurgency movement, which was the focus of chapter 4, seems to exemplify the argument held by an instrumentalist theoretical approach, which maintains that elites, in order to keep power, may make use of ethnic perceptions, and even distort those in order to drive the masses to act in favour of their own interests (Conteh-Morgan, 2004:199). As explained in the introductory phase of this thesis, ethnicity and ancient sentiments represent a powerful artefact if used by political means, and when manipulated, can result in the division of people that once had been unified (Turton, 1997:78).

As observed in chapter 4, the government of Sudan seems to have used ethnicity along this instrumentalist line of thought, consequently managing to redirect the initial insurgency's grievances. It appears that in using the Janjaweed militia as an “ethnic card”, the government was able to pit the “African” tribes, who were initially attacking official installations, against the “Arab” tribes. The latter, even when trying to hold a neutral position, seem to have become directly linked to the Janjaweed militia and its violent methods. Thus, in general, they have become to be seen as enemies by the “African” tribes. In this scenario, it appears to have become impossible for tribes not to take sides. As a result, the insurgency movement that from the outset aimed to obtain the support of all the people in Darfur, who as a whole were all affected by the government's policy of marginalisation, was weakened by the identity manipulation of the Darfurians, who now seem to be fighting each other.

This scenario that has developed in Darfur seems to illustrate Mueller's (2000:1) point of view, who argues that in instances, cases that appear to portray ethnic conflicts, might be more the result of the actions from groups recruited by political leaders than “ancient hatred” feelings. In most cases, as demonstrated by the Janjaweed in Darfur, these groups do not represent a whole ethnic group, although in general, they are portrayed as such. However, as Horowitz (1985:140) asks, when questioning the validity of the theories based on the identity manipulation, “why do the masses follow?” Indeed, Horowitz' question seems relevant. For the author, as seen in chapter 4, “symbolic issues” shouldn't be ignored when analysing ethnic conflicts.

On the subject of “why the masses follow”, Turton ( 1997:78) notes that in order to be manipulated, ethnicity perceptions need to be based on facts from a past, even if those are presented in an erroneous way. Accordingly, the author believes that the proper “historical conditions” are needed to “ensure that the necessary ethnic 'materials' are ready to hand when needed” (Turton, 1997:78). It appears that in the case of Darfur, the environmental factors discussed in chapter 3 contributed to creating these “historical conditions” alluded to by Turton. The societal divisions in Darfur, that in part have been rooted in the years of droughts and resource scarcity, served the government's strategy of manipulating the present conflict, with the intention of portraying the situation on the ground as a mere “tribal war”, and not as an insurgency

movement. Since in the case of Darfur the insurgent rebels are Muslims, the government couldn't base its conflict manipulation along religious divisions, as it did when employing the "Arab" militias to fight the southern "Christian" rebel movement. In Darfur, it had to play the "ethnic card". As observed in chapter 4, the government recruited the Janjaweed militia members amongst the nomad tribes that have been most affected by the drought, and always along "Arab" ethnic lines. It would seem that the government's strategy was to give fuel to the already prevalent disputes over resources in the region.

Evidence presented in chapter 4 also indicates that in the case of Darfur, "opportunism" also played its role in the militia's recruitment process, an issue that is examined by Mueller (2000) in a wider context. For the author, people such as "criminals and criminal-like elements" tend to join these groups employed by political means of ethnic manipulation due to the opportunity of profiting through crimes with total impunity and official support. As seen in Darfur, not only were the members of the militia paid high salaries in terms of regional earnings, but were also given free licence to loot.

In exacerbating the Darfurian societal divisions, it seems that the government not only managed to redirect the grievances of the insurgency movement, weakening the rebellion, but it appears that through this military strategy, the government also managed to manipulate the international community, as seen in chapter 2. In portraying the conflict as a "tribal war" and always denying the political movement behind the insurgency, the government was able to gain time. Capitalising on the international community's contradictory interests, the government up to now, has managed to go through multiple peace initiatives without having, in practice, to concede any major power-sharing deals or policy changes, which are amongst the rebels' main demands. Meanwhile, the rebel groups are becoming more divided over time, giving further room for the government to manipulate the situation in its favour, and thus keeping its power. In this scenario, any prospects of peace appear to be a vague hope.



#### **4.5 Prospects of peace?**

When Turton (1997:80) says that by the international community ignoring the distinct roots of conflicts behind oversimplified explanations such as the ones based only on pure “ethnic hatred” causes, it indirectly creates space for political leaders to manipulate the masses, the author seems to be correct. Through playing the “ethnic card”, the government managed to disperse the international community’s attention from what was happening on the ground in Darfur. Since at the time, the international community was more preoccupied in dealing with the matter of the conflict in the south of Sudan, the government was able to implement its military strategy, which eventually resulted in further societal divisions in Darfur. Divisions which, as time passes, seem to become more impossible to reconcile.

I would agree with Brown (2001:4), when the author notes how it is important for scholars to have a broader vision and analyse all the factors linked to a war situation, instead of focusing only on one factor, such as economic, social, or cultural. It seems that it is only in analysing all possible aspects of a conflict that it can become possible to formulate remedial measures. As Srinivasan (2006) from the Minorities Rights Groups points out, there were earlier signs indicating a possible scenario of conflict in Darfur, however these were largely ignored. Following this argument, Mohammed (2002) notes that many inter-group conflicts “go unnoticed”. It seems that in treating these conflicts as mere “tribal disputes”, as in the case of Darfur, they can escalate more easily and develop into large-scale wars, requiring far more complex solutions.

The fact that these same signs are also present in other areas of Sudan, as El-Tom (2006) states, makes understanding the interplay between the root causes of the Darfur war even more imperative. Perhaps, in this way, other wars in the country could be avoided.

In terms of peace initiatives, it seems that while various issues are examined in isolation and independently of each other, no solution for the conflict will be reached. With no doubt, any peace agreement in Darfur has to address, for example, the environmental matters and related factors, amongst them, the land ownership issue in

the region and the lack of development. This approach seems to have been ignored during the many peace negotiations mentioned throughout chapter 2.

#### **4.4 Room for Future Research**

When considering one of the arguments defended in this thesis, that environmental factors appear to have contributed to creating suitable conditions for the government's manipulation of the conflict along ethnic lines, a question may spring to the reader's mind. If it wasn't for the droughts and desertification process, would the conflict have developed in the same way? Whilst believing that there is enough evidence to indicate the importance of environmental aspects on the present identity division in Darfur, and indeed, that resource competition in the region made it easier for the government to pit one community against the other, I don't think that this study can answer this enquiry. Any possible conclusion based on the findings from this thesis would be a mere guess. Further empirical research would be necessary in order to give a clear explanation of this aspect.

A subject that would form an interesting topic for investigation through field research is the previous fluid ethnic boundaries in the region. As mentioned in chapter 3, prior studies demonstrated that in the past, people used to move from one tribe to another, thus, also changing their perceived identity. During the extensive research undertaken for this thesis, no conclusive data was found, for example, to indicate which side these people have taken in the present conflict. To clarify this, if in the past a Fur decided to become a nomad, thus, adopting a more "Arab" culture, in the present situation, did this Fur remain as an "Arab" or did he return to his Fur tribe to fight alongside the "Africans"? This point could possibly help to demonstrate how much the present conflict is based on resources competition or identity links. If the Fur would prefer to remain with the "Arabs", fighting on their side, it could indicate, for example, that in fact his "origins" are not essential, but more important is his economic activity correlation, and his necessity of securing natural resources in a scenario of scarcity. It seems possible that this point could also demonstrate to what extent the societal divisions in the area were as a result of resource competition, thus indicating the importance or not of the environmental factor.

However, independently of this level of “importance or not” of the environmental factor, or the apparent government manipulation of the conflict, which were amongst the main focuses of this thesis, it seems relevant to conclude that these aspects should be factored into any possible analysis of the roots of the conflict in Darfur, as should others alluded to but not examined in depth in this study. It seems that only by having a broad understanding of the complex situation in Darfur, which as demonstrated in this study, goes beyond the “ethnic hatred” explanations, that the parties involved in peace negotiations might have a real hope of stopping the violence in the region, and maybe, prevent future similar wars.

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